

S E R M O N S
O N
PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

K
BY ANDREW KIPPIS, D. D.
F. R. S. AND S. A.

L O N D O N :

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THE Author of the following discourses hath committed them to the press in compliance with the desire of several of his congregation. This, he hopes, will be a sufficient apology for their public appearance. It will be a sincere satisfaction to him, if his feeble endeavours shall, in any degree, contribute to promote those great practical purposes which ought to be the prime aim of every christian preacher.

The first, twelfth, and sixteenth sermons have been separately published

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lished many years ago, but are now little known. The last discourse, on the Lord's Supper, has been printed at different times, in order to be given away. It is added to the present collection, at the request of a learned and respectable clergyman of the Church of England.

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The ADVANTAGES of RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE.

PROV. XIX. 2. former part.

*Also, that the soul be without knowledge,
it is not good.*

THE truth of this assertion is so evident at first sight, that few will venture to call it in question. But the unhappiness is, that there is frequently a shameful inconsistency between the professed principles and the practices of men. However readily they may in words agree with the observation of Solomon in the text; yet if we consult their conduct, and not their language, we shall be almost inclined to imagine, that no sentiment can be farther from their hearts. For do we not

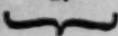
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behold the larger part of the human race eager for the acquisition of any thing, rather than knowledge? Riches are sought after with the utmost diligence, anxiety, and toil; sensual pleasure is purchased at the expence of health, fortune, and reputation; and ambition is pursued by her votaries with many a painful step: nay, the most trivial amusements, the slightest vanities, often become the business of life. But how comparatively small is the number of those who are solicitous for that best cultivation of the mind, which will be productive of the wisdom that leads to eternal happiness! While therefore we see men acting so contrary to acknowledged truths, it will be useful to resume and enforce the plainest subjects; not so much with a design to convince the judgment, as to make, if possible, an impression upon the imagination, and to rouse the insensible into a practical feeling of what they allow in speculation. With this view I have pitched on the declaration of the royal Moralist, that for “the soul to be without
“ knowledge, it is not good.”

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These words are capable of different constructions : but, as the version given in our translation is very rational, and entirely agreeable to the original, I shall, without farther preface, endeavour

First, To point out that kind of knowledge, which is peculiarly important and necessary. And,

Secondly, To shew on what accounts it is not good for the soul to be without knowledge.

I am, in the first place, to point out the kind of knowledge, which is peculiarly important and necessary. There are various arts and sciences, and a great number of objects, upon which the regulation or enjoyment of common life principally depends. With these, or some of these, according to our different situations, it is indispensably requisite that every one of us should be acquainted. Whatever be the lot assigned us by Providence, we are not exempted from certain offices and duties, which demand proportionable degrees of wisdom, in order to their being discharged with propriety and credit: and with regard to

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such as are in a low or middle station, it is incumbent upon them to be instructed in a particular trade, employment, or profession, in which they are obliged to excel, as far as they are able. Independently, also, of the skill we are bound to acquire in our separate callings, the general improvement of the mind should be an object of our warm and earnest attention. We cannot possibly go through the world with any tolerable reputation or advantage, unless we understand the rules of prudent behaviour: and it is of the highest importance to obtain that sound way of judging with relation to common events and appearances, which constitutes good sense; a quality of incomparable excellence. It will, likewise, if we are favoured with opportunity, ability, and leisure, be extremely desirable and useful, to take extensive views of men and things. The works and laws of nature, the affections and operations of the human breast, history ecclesiastical and civil, the constitution and government of our own country, the compositions of ingenious authors, the liberal and polite arts, are all
of

of them subjects that richly deserve, and will richly reward our industrious inquiry.

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But the knowledge chiefly intended by Solomon, as is evident from the signification of the word in other places, and from the manner of expression used in the text, is religious knowledge. It is that knowledge which in a peculiar sense it is not good for the soul to be without; which relates to our pious and moral temper and conduct; and which, consequently, directs us in the path of immortal felicity. To this we shall now confine our meditations; and shall begin with observing, that we ought to be acquainted with the great principles and duties of natural religion. And here the grand, the fundamental point is to entertain just sentiments concerning the ever-blessed God. It is evident, from a survey of the beauty, contrivance, and extent of the universe, that there exists an eternal, independent, and almighty Being, by whom it was created: and, to a candid and diligent inquirer, it will equally be evident, that this Being is perfect in wisdom, and boundless in goodness. Upon farther

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examination it will appear, that he continues to direct the worlds he hath made; and that he stands in several important and endearing relations towards his rational offspring, which demand suitable returns of gratitude, obedience, and love. The characters he sustains, as our creator, preserver, friend, and father; as our inspector, law-giver, and final judge; do all of them require correspondent affections, and lay us under an indispensable obligation to a correspondent behaviour. It is therefore absolutely necessary to form right opinions in these respects: for unless we are in some measure instructed in the nature, attributes, providence, and moral government of the one God and parent of the universe, together with the worship and duty he expects at our hands; we shall err at the very foundation, and become the slaves of ignorance, idolatry, superstition, or wickedness.

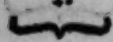
With the knowledge of the Deity, should be joined a proper insight into our own frame, and the purposes for which our faculties were bestowed. We may be well
assured,

assured, that the great former of our spirits had valuable ends in view, when he placed us on the earth. If we consider these ends with reference only to this life, it will be found to be the design of the Almighty, that we provide as happily as we are able for the accommodation of the body; that we particularly attend to the cultivation of the mind; and above all, that we act the equitable, the social, and the generous part, in the whole of our intercourse with our fellow-creatures. Nor is our duration limited by death and the grave. Our higher capacities, and the conduct of our Maker in his administration of things below, have a reference to a future state, and declare that the blessedness of that state is inseparably connected with our present attainments and virtues.

But what will it avail us to be endued with the noblest powers, and created for the most worthy purposes, if at the same time we are unacquainted with the intentions of our existence, and the methods of complying with them? It is therefore of the utmost importance, to understand what is the part

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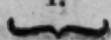
we are ordained to act, with respect either to this or the other world. We should know the characters we are appointed to sustain in life; the dispositions in which our highest excellence consists; the duties we owe to God, to society, and to ourselves; and the qualifications that will fit us for the divine approbation hereafter. To a knowledge of the great truths of natural religion, should be added likewise an acquaintance with the foundations they rest upon, and the evidences on which they are supported. The several arguments which prove the existence and perfections of the Supreme Being, the obligations of virtue, and a state of future rewards and punishments, do well deserve a diligent inquiry.

It is, however, extremely difficult, even in the present enlightened times, at least for the generality of mankind, to form an exact system of sacred principles, without the assistance of immediate discoveries from Heaven; and therefore it is with peculiar pleasure that I proceed to observe, that it is incumbent upon us to understand
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the contents of the Christian revelation. If our heavenly Father hath been so benevolent as to give his creatures some extraordinary information of his will, it should certainly be received with the warmest gratitude. Now this he hath actually done. He was graciously pleased to lead men by the hand from the beginning of the world; and manifested to the Jews such displays of his unity and supremacy, such copious rules of worship and obedience, as filled their minds with valuable knowledge. But it is our felicity to enjoy still brighter instructions; instructions with which it highly concerns us to be acquainted. The children of men, notwithstanding the light which shone around them, had suffered their minds to be involved in darkness and error. Though the Supreme Being continually spoke to them in the grandeur, beauty, and beneficence of his creation, in the course of his providence, and in their own moral faculties, yet he spoke to them in vain. Such, however, were the unparalleled riches of his goodness, that the disregard which had been paid to his former lectures

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lectures of wisdom did not prevent his sending at length the Lord Jesus Christ upon the earth, to become the messenger of truth, duty, and happiness. In consequence of what our Saviour hath taught, all the great branches of natural religion are set before us without the trouble of laborious researches. Nor are they only set before us with perspicuity, and published in a fairer edition, but are enforced by a mighty authority; even the authority of our great Master, acting by commission from his heavenly Father. We are called to the practice of goodness by new and prevailing arguments. Virtue in the life of Jesus hath been rendered visible to the eye; and hath assumed an appearance inexpressibly engaging and lovely. We are encouraged to persevere in righteousness, by being assured of a divine aid: and our obedience is animated by the most forcible sanctions; sanctions that are addressed to every principle of our frame, and which are calculated either to shake the heart with terror, or to draw it with the gentlest ties of affection. Several important particulars

culars are likewise in the New Testament fully revealed and ascertained, which the utmost efforts of human reason were not able to reach. Our holy religion hath afforded a most illustrious, affecting, and joyful representation of the essential placability of God, and his tenderness to transgressors; and it has not only clearly revealed, but, by the resurrection of Christ, hath absolutely ascertained the doctrine of ETERNAL LIFE; a doctrine, the value and importance of which no words can sufficiently describe, no human imagination fully conceive.

Since, therefore, the Christian revelation is enriched with the stores of the most precious knowledge, to that we should have recourse; and thence should we draw enlarged, and honourable, and endearing representations of the ever-blessed Deity. Thence we should imbibe the sentiments of a rational and manly devotion. Thence we should be instructed how to regulate our temper and our actions. Thence we should take the examples of a genuine excellence in life and manners. Thence we should
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derive the most sacred influences, the most powerful motives, and the most ravishing expectations. We should acquaint ourselves with the scriptures; make them the object of our frequent perusal, and attentive study; and spare no pains to understand their real meaning. In an especial manner we should take care to have right views with regard to the design and spirit of the Gospel. It ought to be considered by us not merely as a system of speculations, but as an act of grace to a degenerate world; and as a divine philosophy, which is intended to purify and sweeten our dispositions, to enlarge our benevolent affections, to fill our hearts with peace and joy, and to give us an increasing resemblance to the Father of light, perfection, and bliss.

As, likewise, we exist at a period of time, in which the supernatural authority of our holy religion is disbelieved or doubted by great numbers, it is of peculiar importance for us, not only to know its general contents, but the arguments which prove it to come from God. The dark and corrupted state of mankind when Jesus appeared;

ed; the inward excellence of his doctrines and precepts; his uncommon, illustrious, and divine character, a character which the genius of Homer or Milton could not have invented and supported, much less such weak persons as the Apostles originally were; the strongest historical evidence; the accomplishment of prophecies; the performance of mighty miracles; the speedy and amazing success of the Christian revelation, do all concur to shew, that its voice is the voice alone of celestial wisdom. Into these things it behoves us therefore, as our opportunities permit, to inquire; that we may * “be able to give a reason of the “hope that is in us,” when we are called to vindicate our sacred profession.

With regard to the contents, as well as to the evidence of the Christian revelation, it is of great moment that our knowledge of it be the result of personal inquiry and conviction, and that we study it with a candid and liberal spirit. We ought to know that the real doctrines of the Gospel are clear and rational; that its worship is pure and

* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

simple;

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simple; that its temper is mild and beneficent; and that its intention is noble and divine. It is of consequence to be thoroughly grounded in the principles on which alone the Protestant reformation can be supported; and which are, our absolute right to read, examine, and interpret the sacred writings for ourselves; our unalienable title to private judgment; together with the injustice, the iniquity, and the hatefulness of persecution, in every form and degree wherein it is exercised.

In this brief representation of the kind of knowledge which is peculiarly important and necessary, I have had respect to the situation of things in our own country, and to the advantages which, as Britons, we have the happiness of enjoying. For the same degree of wisdom which may justly be expected from us, cannot be expected from those who are not favoured with the same opportunities. The righteous and benevolent Governor of the universe, will demand no more from any of his creatures than he hath given them ability to perform: and all who improve in the best manner the light they

they are blessed with, be that light more or less, will undoubtedly receive the approbation of their Maker.

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I now proceed, Secondly,

To shew on what accounts it is not good for the soul to be without knowledge, especially the knowledge of religion.

Knowledge is in itself a most excellent and desirable qualification. It is so necessary to every valuable purpose, that the great Author of our frame did not leave men indifferent concerning it, but implanted a strong passion for it in the breast; and has made it appear agreeable and charming, independently of the advantages with which it is otherwise attended. This hath been taken notice of, and elegantly displayed by the best Pagan philosophers. Solomon likewise asserts that * “through desire
“ a man seeketh and intermeddleth with all
“ wisdom.” And in another place he hath told us, that † “a man shall be commended according to his wisdom.” This is indeed conformable to the general sentiments of mankind. For what can be more evident, than that a person possessed

* Prov. xviii. 1.

† Prov. xii. 8.

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of an enlightened understanding, is always regarded with a certain veneration and esteem; while voluntary ignorance and stupidity are treated with contempt? Not all the lustre of a noble birth, not all the affluence of wealth, not all the pomp of titles, not all the splendour of power can give dignity to a mind that is destitute of inward improvement. In that case the glare of external things will only add a greater conspicuity to folly, and render it doubly ridiculous.

Well may knowledge be looked upon as a real excellence, since it is one of the grand points by which we are distinguished from the brutes, and hold an honourable rank in the creation of God. By this we are allied to angels, claim kindred with the blessed Deity himself, and are capable of rising for ever in the scale of beings. Such is its inherent worth, that it hath always been represented under the most pleasing images. In particular, it hath been compared to light, the most valuable and reviving part of nature's works; and to that glorious luminary, which is the most beautiful and transporting

transporting object our eyes behold. If we entertain any doubts concerning the intrinsic value of religious knowledge, let us look around us, and we shall be fully convinced how desirable it is to be acquainted with God, with moral, with spiritual, with eternal things. Observe the difference between a cultivated and a barren country. While the former is a lovely, chearful, and delightful sight, the other administers a spectacle of horror. There is an equal difference between the nations in which rational and manly principles of piety prevail, and the nations that are overrun with idolatry, superstition, and error. Was it not the superior wisdom of Socrates, that hath rendered him the glory of the Pagan, and the admiration of the Christian world? How divinely excellent doth our Lord appear in this respect; who treated the sublimest subjects with the utmost freedom, ease, and dignity; and spoke with an understanding, energy, and grace, that charmed and astonished his hearers!

Farther, it is not good for the soul to be without knowledge, because knowledge is

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of great importance to our personal and private felicity. Happiness is what we every one of us aim at, in the whole of our actions: and the desire of it is so essential to our nature, that it cannot be eradicated without destroying the first principles of our mental frame. But what signify our wishes for this invaluable jewel, if we know not where it lies, or in what objects it is to be met with? Our conduct is regulated by our opinions: it is therefore necessary, in order to attain the blessedness we long for, to form right views concerning the method by which it may be acquired. Now this method is pointed out to us by an acquaintance with the dictates of religion. * "He that getteth wisdom," saith Solomon, "loveth his own soul; he that keepeth understanding, shall find good." The pursuit of knowledge is in itself extremely conducive to felicity. It furnishes a pleasure that cannot be met with in the possession of inferior enjoyments; a fine entertainment, which adds a relish to prosperity, and alleviates the hour of distress. It throws a

* Prov. xix. 8.

lustre on greatness, and reflects an honour upon poverty. The person who applies his heart to sacred instruction, hath secured a rational and agreeable employment, that will prevent his having recourse to folly or vice. He will experience a sublime delight in surmounting difficulties, and making a continual progress in the stock of his ideas: and when he hath actually arrived to a system of solid principles, a self-possession and dignity will thence accrue to his mind, which greatly contribute to inward satisfaction. How different is the condition of the wretch who is the slave of ignorance and folly! His time will frequently hang heavy on his hands; he will be a burden to himself; and, should sickness or adversity take away the power of running from amusement to amusement, he will have nothing that can relieve an anxious heart, or support the weakness of his spirits. The knowledge we are speaking of, hath a beneficial influence on our outward circumstances as well as our internal peace. While it is infinitely more valuable than riches or power, it hath a tendency to increase our temporal prosperity.

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rity. For it instructs us to acquire those dispositions and virtues, which, in the general course of things, will be followed by competence, health, credit, esteem, and many other blessings.

It is indeed the property of religious wisdom, so to regulate our conduct in all respects, as shall best advance our truest happiness. We are surrounded by a variety of snares, and called to a variety of duties : a part is assigned for each of us to act : there are often particular difficulties that demand the exertion of our whole skill : and our welfare depends on the manner in which we sustain the character appointed us by the Supreme Being. What then could we do without suitable information of the method in which it is incumbent upon us to behave ? We see that the ignorant fall into perpetual error and misery. They have either no principles at all, or else their minds become an easy prey to the delusion of false ones ; the consequence of which is, that they are bewildered and lost in the path of life. But those who are directed by sacred instruction, understand the way in which they should go.

The knowledge they are endued with, enlarges the mind; and teaches them a proper temper and deportment, with regard to God, themselves, and their fellow creatures. It calls them to devotion, temperance, justice, meekness, and benevolence. It points out what they should be as masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children: and qualifies them to discharge every relation with honour, satisfaction, and advantage. Nay, it will, even in common concerns, where capacities and other opportunities are equal, make them wiser than their neighbours. For an acquaintance with scripture will furnish the understanding with many prudential maxims; and the thoughtful turn which piety inspires, will be very favourable to a sedate and judicious estimate of things.

Should it however happen in the course of events, that our present enjoyments utterly fail; spiritual wisdom will not be at a loss to inform us where felicity may be obtained. It will tell us not to place it, in wealth, in pleasure, in vanity, in titles, or in splendour; but in a superiority to the

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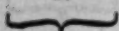
world, in a soul that is raised above distress, in the harmony and kindness of our affections, in the applauding voice of conscience, and in the approbation of our Maker. It will instruct us to consider afflictions as preparatory to a future state; and to fix our dependance and our bliss on joys that are refined, exalted, and durable.

Knowledge is not only conducive to our personal and private felicity, but renders us useful members of society. That our heavenly Father doth not intend us to seek our own happiness only, is plain from a variety of arguments. Nay, he hath not left us to learn our duty to our fellow-creatures from the slow deductions of reason; but hath implanted kind and tender instincts in the breast, which by a sweet compulsion oblige us to mourn with those who mourn, and to rejoice with them that rejoice; which declare that we are intimately united with the whole system of beings: and urge us to exert our endeavours for the welfare of the human race. But even our benevolence may lead us astray, if it be not regulated by the dictates of wisdom. Shall we not find in fact,
that

that a deluded ignorance hath often been spreading misery in the earth, while it believed itself actuated by a regard to the honour of God, and the interests of men? It is therefore of the utmost importance to acquire that just way of thinking, which will prevent the misapplication of our affections, and direct them to their proper objects. Be our abilities and influence great or small, be our station in life high or low, knowledge will instruct us to apply our several talents in that manner which shall be most conducive to the benefit of mankind. It will alike teach the subject and the magistrate, how to advance the public good. Nor will it merely qualify us to discharge our own parts in society, with usefulness: it will also make us capable of advising and regulating others. Hence we may become the lights of the world; and may diffuse those beneficent beams around us, which shall shine on benighted travellers, and discover the path of rectitude and blessedness.

It is, likewise, one of the capital advantages derived from knowledge, that it tends to destroy the bigotry which hath in all ages

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been so fatal to human felicity. That bigotry is the child of ignorance, will be evident to any one who attentively considers the matter. For were men acquainted with the nature of God, they would be well assured, that an all-gracious Being can never condemn his creatures for the variation of their opinions, so long as they sincerely endeavour to find out his will. Did they understand the amiable spirit of the gospel, they would perceive that nothing can be more contrary to its design, than to exclude any from the benefits it proposes, who are solicitous to imbibe its temper, and comply with its precepts. Had they examined their own hearts, they would learn that while they are liable to so much weakness and error, it is the height of arrogance to judge with severity their fellow-men. Did they comprehend the real difficulty that attends many questions, and the plausible things that may frequently be urged on both sides, they would be fully convinced that the wise and good may differ in their views. Had they an acquaintance with the world, they would experience so much piety and virtue among persons

persons of very opposite sentiments, as would enlarge their souls, and fill them with a warm and diffusive charity.

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The same knowledge which is thus happily effectual to drive away bigotry, puts to flight, likewise, the meanness of superstition, and the madness of enthusiasm. It corrects every unworthy notion of God and religion; exposes the principles and practices that have been so ruinous to the order and well-being of society; teaches us to place the ardour of our zeal on objects alone that deserve it; and promotes the cause of universal liberty. If we desire to behold the dreadful consequences of ignorance with regard to divine things, it is but casting our eyes a little on the history of mankind; where we shall meet with such instances of folly and fraud, of barbarity and persecution, as will strike us with horror. It is owing to the prevalence of rational opinions in these respects, that Great Britain is the seat of so much tranquillity and social enjoyment; that the sacred rights of conscience, for the most part, are held inviolable; and that persons are permitted to exert the freedom of their minds,

SERM. minds, without the fear of penalties and
 I. tortures.

It would be impossible, in the bounds of a single discourse, to enumerate all the blessings that flow from religious knowledge. To this we are indebted for the important change which hath been made since the beginning of the Reformation. To this we are indebted for the humanity and gentleness of modern manners. To this we are indebted for the general cultivation and refinement of the understandings of men. It is owing to this, that even arbitrary governments have lost something of their original ferocity; and that there is a source of improvement in Europe, which will, we hope, in future times, shed the most delightful influences on society; and unite its members in peace and harmony. Once more,

It is not good for the soul to be without knowledge, because knowledge points out to us an eternal felicity. * "Understanding," says the wise man, "is a well-spring of life to him that hath it;" and what he hath here spoken with reference, it may be, to this

* Prov. xvi. 22.

world alone, may justly be applied to another. The several branches of human science are intended only to bless and adorn our present existence: but religious knowledge bids us provide for an immortal being, sets the path of salvation before us, and is our inseparable companion in the road to glory. It is so essentially necessary to our final welfare, that without some degree of acquaintance with it, no moral improvement can be expected. As it instructs us in the way to endless bliss, so it will survive that mighty day, when all worldly literature and accomplishments shall for ever cease. At that solemn period in which the records and registers of men shall be destroyed, the systems of human policy be dissolved, and the grandest works of genius die, the wisdom which is spiritual and heavenly, shall not only subsist, but be increased to an extent, far beyond the present powers of our nature. Of this the apostle gives a beautiful representation, 1 Cor. xiii. 12. "For
" now we see through a glass, darkly; but
" then face to face; now I know in part;
" but then shall I know, even as also I am
" known."

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I.

“known.” Our views of things are at present obscure, imperfect, partial, and liable to error. But when we arrive to the realms of everlasting light, the clouds that shadowed our understanding will be removed; we shall behold with surprizing clearness, the attributes, ways, and works of God; shall perceive more distinctly the design of his dispensations; shall trace with rapture the wonders of nature and of grace; and become acquainted with a thousand glorious objects, of which the imagination can as yet have no conception.

Such are the consequences that result from the knowledge of religion. It delivers us from that eternal death, to which an ignorance of divine truths leaves the mind continually exposed. It prepares us to be inhabitants of the celestial regions, to improve for ever in moral excellence, to acquire a dignity perpetually increasing, to be associates with angels, to sit down with the Redeemer on his throne, and to be always advancing in a nearer and nearer resemblance to the great Original of beauty, perfection, and blessedness.

What

What words then can sufficiently express its importance and necessity! Every argument, every consideration, concurs to prove the truth of the assertion in the text, "that
" for the soul to be without knowledge, it is
" not good."

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I.
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Since, then, the knowledge of religion is so extremely valuable, it behoves us to be thankful, that we are favoured with such abundant means of attaining it. It is our felicity to enjoy religious instruction in its full perfection. We do not live under the law of nature alone, but under the law of Jesus likewise. It is our joy, our glory, to partake of the gospel as it is in itself; to partake of it, free from corruption, superstition, and priestcraft. Our situation is delightful in an eminent degree. Can we, then, reflect upon these things, without the most fervent thankfulness to that benevolent Being, who hath commanded light about us; and all is light? With what gratitude, with what admiration, with what affection should it inspire us, when we consider his boundless goodness! Not to be sensible of such mercies, would argue a disposition that is void of moral feelings.

To

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I.

To our thankfulness for the means of knowledge, should be added an ardent solicitude to improve in it. Not to do so, in the present age, will subject us to deserved reproach. The same degree of ignorance which in former times might pass uncensured, would now be treated with contempt. Nay, without some considerable skill in the principles we maintain, and the foundations they rest upon, we shall not be able to vindicate our Christian profession; and that is what we may often be called to, in this period of universal enquiry. It should therefore be our earnest concern, perpetually to increase in real understanding. To excel in the different parts of human science, is very desirable; and it is of great importance to discharge with ability the duty of the employment to which we are more immediately appointed by Providence. But above all should we grow in the knowledge of religion; an exhortation that deserves particularly to be regarded by those who are in the youthful part of life. The knowledge of religion, my friends, is infinitely more worthy your pursuit, than the trifling amusements,

ments, the false, the dangerous, the destructive pleasures in which the generality of young persons are engaged. This, this it is, which will richly reward your diligent application. Be persuaded then to cultivate a solid taste in reading and thinking. It is true, that a taste for reading is the fashion of the day; but it is often rendered useless, or worse, by being principally directed to such compositions as are at best superficial, and frequently hurtful. But may it be your care to acquire an acquaintance with that valuable wisdom, which leads to inward and eternal blessedness! Search into the heavenly treasures contained in the Bible; study to know your own hearts; and labour to obtain such an insight into the tempers and characters of men, as shall guard you against their seducements, and direct you to a right conduct in all your intercourse with them. Suffer not yourselves to rest in slight attainments; but endeavour to be always rising from improvement to improvement. Be it matter of particular caution with you, to avoid the hindrances of knowledge. Far be

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I.

it from you to let your powers be stupified by indolence: and especially should you remember the observation of Solomon *: “ He that walketh with wise men shall be “ wise; but a companion of fools shall be “ destroyed.” Embrace with gratitude and zeal every opportunity, and every method by which you may proceed in sacred instruction: and by no means forget to look up to the great Father of lights, with earnest supplications that he would dissipate the darkness of your souls, illuminate your breasts with the rays of celestial truth, and † “ cause “ you to know the way in which you ought “ to walk.” Finally, let it be practical knowledge that employs your principal attention. Consider, that it is not merely an exact system of speculative principles which will avail to happiness, but the wisdom that is seated in the heart, as well as the head; the wisdom which is calculated to inspire the mind with amiable, devout, and godlike affections. For thus, and thus only, will you be able to sustain the part allotted you in life, with propriety and dignity. Thus only

* Prov. xiii. 20.

† Psal. cxliii. 8.

can you lay a foundation for genuine felicity. SERM.
I.
And thus only will you be qualified to join
with that divine assembly of angels and glo-
rified spirits, who are ever advancing to
new discoveries, and are ever acquiring new
enlargements of their faculties. Amen!

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can you lay a foundation for genuine piety.
And thus only will you be qualified to join
with him in the assembly of angels and
saints, who are ever advancing to
The Weakness of Man
new discoveries, and are ever adding new
enrichments of their intellect. Amen!

SECTION

S E R M O N II.

The WEAKNESS of MAN.

PSALM VIII. 4, 5.

*What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
and the son of man, that thou visitest him?
For thou hast made him a little lower than
the angels, and hast crowned him with
glory and honour.*

IT has justly been observed, that the proper study of mankind, is man. Undoubtedly, it must be of high importance to us, that we get acquainted with our own frame, understand the purposes we were created for, and know the real extent and limits of our capacities. The usual error of those who have attempted to describe human nature hath been their taking only a partial survey of the subject. By considering it in one, or some few lights alone, they have been

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led to give very different and even contradictory representations of the matter. Numbers, while they have looked at our bright side, while they have contemplated the greatness of the powers of the soul, the attainments and the virtues it is qualified to possess, and the vast progress of several individuals, both in knowledge and in goodness, have carried the idea of our abilities and dignity to a prodigious height. Others again, by reflecting on the infirmities, the bad passions, and the vices that attend us; by seeing the low state of the intellectual and moral powers among the bulk of mankind, have been induced to set forth the constitution of the mind as wholly contemptible and base; as having nothing in it which is amiable, excellent, or valuable.

But, surely, both these descriptions are guilty of an undue extreme. The true state of the case is, that man is a mixed being, and unites seeming contradictions. If we survey him in one view, we shall find reason to admire his grandeur; if we survey him in another view, we shall find reason to be grieved at his meanness; and we shall frequently

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quently behold a strange composition of grandeur and meanness in the same person.

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It is the excellency of the sacred writings, that the errors we have complained of are avoided by them, and that they have represented our frame in its different and its proper colours. Of this we have a convincing evidence, and a fine instance, in the text, and in the psalm from which the text is taken. The general intention of the psalm is to shew the dignity of our nature, and to make us sensible of the honour which God hath conferred upon us, by fixing us in so considerable a rank, and subjecting the earth to our dominion. But that the royal poet had, at the same time, a strong consciousness and feeling of our weakness and littleness, appears from the comparative light in which he has placed us, and from the very animated interrogation he hath used: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" The original is still more forcible; for the

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word, translated man, frequently signifies miserable, mortal man; and the phrase, son of man, strictly denotes son of the ground, and is a phrase which often expresses a mean and abject condition. But, notwithstanding this view of our situation, which is, in some respects, a humbling one, David adds, "Thou hast made him
" a little lower than the angels, and hast
" crowned him with glory and honour;" and then the psalmist proceeds to assert that the divine works below, and all the creatures of the globe, are put under our jurisdiction and government.

We are, therefore, fully authorized, from the text,

First, To describe the dark side, or the imperfection of our present state.

And,

Secondly, To take a survey of our bright side, or the dignity with which we are invested.

Each of these heads we shall endeavour to illustrate; and shall conclude each of them with a suitable improvement. We are,

First, to describe the dark side, or the
4 meanness

meanness and imperfection of our present state. Now, the psalmist evidently leads us to contemplate man, first, in a comparative light, and, then, as he is in himself.

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First, the psalmist leads us to the contemplation of man in a comparative light. This is plain from the text, and the preceding verse. And here I cannot avoid stopping a moment to reflect how contemptible we are, when considered with reference to the ever-blessed God. When we call to mind the infinite distance there is between the Supreme Majesty of the universe and ourselves, what can we say? All language is too faint to express, in any proper manner, our inferiority to the great Source of life, excellence, and beauty. Who can enter into competition with him? Who can pretend to resemble him, with any degree of rivalry or equality? None, none can dare to assume so bold, so impious a claim. The most exalted seraphs, the beings who stand at the head of the creation, and whose capacities are raised inexpressibly beyond our conceptions, cannot be mentioned in comparison with HIM; nor can they ever be

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mentioned in comparison with him, though their powers are always increasing, and will, in the course of their existence, advance to amazing heights. Still, though eternity itself shall behold them pushing forwards to superior degrees of knowledge, purity, and dignity, still they will be infinitely beneath the Former and Ruler of heaven and earth. What then is man? He scarcely deserves to be named on such an occasion.

Quitting, therefore, a subject to which words are absolutely insufficient, let it be observed that there are many orders of created spirits, who are much above us in the scale of beings, and with respect to whom we sustain an inconsiderable rank. The scriptures inform us that there are vast numbers of intellectual agents, who surround the throne of the Almighty, and inhabit the place where he is peculiarly manifested. When we reflect, therefore, that some of them may, at first, have been formed with prodigious abilities; that they may have existed for astonishing periods of time; that they have enjoyed the particular presence, and been engaged in the particular service of the Deity; and

and that they have been perpetually improving in understanding, in holiness, in grandeur; what an exalted idea must we entertain of their capacities, graces, and situation! How greatly inferior must the wisest and the best of the sons of Adam be, to the intelligences that stand so high in the system of things! It is, indeed, true, with regard to others of the angels, that we are next in degree to them, in the divine works; as is expressly declared in the text. Nevertheless, we are lower than the meanest of them; and as to the superior and most elevated ranks of them, no language, no conceptions, may be able to specify, or imagine, how much they excel us in every glorious attainment.

But farther, if we contemplate on the immensity of the creation, we may well say with the psalmist, "When I consider thy heavens, the operation of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?" The more we reflect upon the immensity of the creation, the more amazing will it appear. From what
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we see ourselves, and from what the best observations and arguments enable us to collect, we have reason to believe that there are prodigious numbers of suns and planets, besides the sun and the planets with which we are acquainted. If we take an accurate and extensive survey of the frame of nature, we shall find continual occasion to enlarge our opinion concerning the greatness of the universe. Nay, when we consider that God existed from eternity, that no bounds can possibly be set to his power, and that a disposition to communicate happiness must ever have been an essential part of his character, we can scarcely avoid coming to this conclusion, that he must always have exerted himself in producing systems of things, and that his works are without limits. Now, since the world was principally formed that it might be a commodious habitation for living beings, what an astonishing multitude, what an astonishing variety of them must there, in fact, be? How diversified, how exalted, may be the powers of several of the intelligent orders that people this grand, this complicated fabric, of which we behold so small

small a portion ! In short, the earth will diminish to a point, and the human race be almost lost in our thoughts, when we reflect upon the immensity and the number of the divine productions.

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But, from viewing man in a comparative light, let us proceed,

Secondly, To contemplate his meanness and imperfection, as he is in himself. And, here, the first object we shall briefly mention is the narrow extent of his knowledge. How excellent his knowledge is in many respects, and how far it reaches, will be treated on hereafter : our present business is only to point out its weakness; and alas ! would our time permit, it would be easy, too easy, to do this, in a large abundance of instances. If we look around us, and examine the condition of our fellow mortals, what deep ignorance shall we meet with ! Many savage tribes and people there are, who are unacquainted with the common arts of social life ; and who, with regard to religion, have scarcely any idea of its fundamental principles. They have little or no conception of the existence, perfections, and government of
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that God who is their creator and benefactor; and as to the sense of good and evil implanted in their breasts, so small is the attention they pay to it, and the cultivation they afford it, that, in various cases, they are become deaf to its instructions and admonitions. If we take a survey of more civilized countries, there, likewise, we shall find a deplorable darkness among the generality of mankind. Nor is this the situation of persons in the Mohammedan and Popish nations alone, but of multitudes among the Protestants, and among the Protestants, too, who have enjoyed the fairest opportunities of gaining a comprehensive information concerning the will of their Maker. Even in our own land, a land that has been favoured with the highest advantages, it is surprizing, it is melancholy, to reflect how little light hath entered into the minds of great numbers. Enthusiasm, superstition, and shameful ignorance, are frequently to be seen in this kingdom. In fact, how few are there, comparatively speaking, who have attained to just and noble sentiments, with relation to divine truth!

Nay,

Nay, if we consider human knowledge in its best estate, when it has been cultivated to the utmost, we shall perceive it to be exceedingly imperfect. Our faculties, when stretched to their full length, are comprehended within very narrow limits. There are many appearances in the world which we cannot explain; many difficulties that we cannot penetrate; many enquiries concerning the nature and ways of God that we cannot resolve. The inward constitutions, the real causes and connections of the most obvious phenomena are beyond our apprehension. There are, even, a thousand questions concerning the practical sciences, concerning the arts, commerce, and politics, which the finest understandings are puzzled to answer with clearness and certainty; and with respect to which they will come to different conclusions. So, also, with regard to religious matters, we should, if left to ourselves, be at a loss in determining the weightiest points; the points highly essential to our comfort and happiness. We should be filled with doubts and perplexities in respect to our eternal existence, and other subjects of principal

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principal importance. Accordingly, without the assistance of revelation, the most laborious examiners could not obtain a satisfactory solution of these subjects. We seem rather fitted for action than speculation; and a Newton himself, with all his vast abilities, could only be the better enabled to discern how small a portion of things we are acquainted with, compared with what is hidden from our eyes.

It would be well if it were in knowledge alone that we are found defective. It would be well if we had constantly preserved excellent dispositions and a good conduct, though our capacities had not been so extensive as we could wish. But the worst of our case is that we are sinful creatures. That a deep and dreadful disorder hath seized upon the human race, is a fact that cannot be denied, to whatever original it be owing. The frame of the mind is disturbed, the passions have gained an undue ascendancy; and we have too prevailing a propensity to sensible objects and gratifications. If we look around us, what a wide wickedness shall we see diffused in the earth! How numerous,

numerous, how aggravated, are the vices that prevail among the children of Adam! What irregularities, what confusion, do we meet with on every side! To enumerate the black catalogue of transgressions that abound in this troubled scene, would be a long and a disagreeable task. We shall not expatiate on the dismal theme; but leave it to be represented by your own experience and observation, and by the history of the world: the history of the world, which is little else than the history of our follies and enormities, together with the mischiefs they have occasioned; and which will loudly proclaim that mankind have been corrupt and criminal in all ages. Some there are who appear almost totally lost to what is amiable and excellent, who are the slaves of evil habits, who plunge into the excesses of iniquity, who are not merely hurtful to themselves, but extremely injurious to their fellow creatures. Their transgressions are of such a kind as to be attended with the most fatal effects, and to produce extensive and complicated misery and ruin. Others have in them a strange mixture of virtues and defects,

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fects, so that it is difficult to determine which preponderate, and whether we are to number these persons among the good or the bad. At one time they are exercising the most lovely and useful dispositions, and at another time they are carried away by headstrong appetites and passions. Others again, are, upon the whole, noble and valuable characters; and yet their worth shall be diminished and shaded by some unaccountable weakness, or some darling wrong inclination, which cleaves to them in the midst of all their accomplishments. Blessed be God, there are, likewise, and we trust too, considerable numbers, who are substantially pious and holy, who endeavour universally to comply with the divine will, and who are formed after the image of their Maker, and the example of their Saviour. But even these are far from being spotless in their temper and behaviour. Where indeed, our blessed Lord excepted, shall we find any that are complete among the sons of mortality? In vain shall we look for a sinless purity in the fairest and brightest ornaments of our race, in those who have done the greatest honour

honour to our common nature, and to the gospel of Christ.

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But, from the survey of man in his mental and moral state, let us turn to him in another view, and we shall perceive that he is a dependent, feeble, and afflicted creature. We entirely depend upon the Deity for existence, continuance, and support; but this is no peculiar mark of our weakness. This is essential to every the most exalted mind that God hath made; and it is our felicity and glory that we are under the guardianship and care of our heavenly Father. But, under him, we depend, likewise, on a variety of objects. We depend on the mutual assistance of our fellow men; and without their help and concurrence we could not subsist, much less could we enjoy a comfortable life. This, however, is no disagreeable evidence of our imperfect state; as it gives occasion to the most amiable connections, affords scope to the exercise of the finest affections, and calls forth the noblest virtues. But we depend, too, on the elements around us, on the sun that warms us, on the air we breathe in, and on the earth we tread upon.

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We cannot be upheld without the daily supplies of food, and the nightly supplies of sleep. Since, therefore, we rely on such a diversity of things, it is no wonder that we are feeble creatures. How can those be otherwise than feeble creatures, whose very existence is connected with a diversity of circumstances that are perpetually changing? So great is our imbecility, that the most trivial matters may easily hurt us. A blast of wind, in a certain direction, may disorder our frame, and shake it even to dissolution. The fall of a slight weight upon us may deeply injure a tender part, and the fall of a larger weight may crush our bodies to destruction. Our strength, according to the idiom of sacred writ, which is equally elegant and forcible, our strength is weakness. For the truth of this assertion we might appeal to many arguments, to many instances; but we need appeal to no other arguments or instances than what are furnished by the diseases to which we are liable. Nor is it in these cases alone that we are subject to distress: we are afflicted beings in a variety of respects. There are multitudes of inlets

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to sorrow. Our sweetest comforts and dearest pleasures are often the sources of grief; and calamities, of one sort or another, are our frequent portion. They stand thick around us, attend us in every period and station of life, and hold out an affecting and unceasing proof of our infirmity and imperfection.

But, not to enlarge on sentiments that must frequently occur, we shall conclude with observing that we are transitory and dying creatures. How short our continuance is below, is set, every day, before us, in the most striking manner; if we would but duly attend to the continual lectures of our perishing condition. Some do but, as it were, peep into the world, and almost instantly leave it to new comers. Some stay here no more than three or four years. Others are taken away in the bloom of youth. Others are cut off in their full strength, and in the maturity of their wisdom, riches, and honour: and as to those who inhabit the longest in this terrestrial globe, how small a period is assigned them! The term of their present existence is speedily past, and then they return to their

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original dust. Such is the fate of all the descendants of Adam. Death levels every distinction, sweeps us away as the grass of the field, and lodges us in the silent grave. When, therefore, to the contemplation of our ignorance, our sinfulness, our dependance, and our feebleness, we add the consideration of our frailty and mortality; when we reflect that amidst our highest affluence, grandeur, and felicity, we are comparatively but for a moment, we must be sensible that at our best estate we are altogether vanity; and cannot avoid feeling the propriety and energy of the psalmist's exclamation, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

And now, from this part of our subject, we may learn,

First, a lesson of humility. It is an observation of the wise son of Sirach, an observation of singular emphasis and beauty, that "pride was not made for man." It is true, that we ought to be thankful for the advantages, the privileges, the honours bestowed upon us; and we may reasonably rejoice

joice in the favours of our Almighty Benefactor, and in the glory with which he hath crowned us: but surely we have causes that are sufficient to keep us from being highly elated. We shall find circumstances enow to humble us, which ever way we turn our view. The weakness of our bodies and our minds, the disorders we are subject to, and the very limited share of our knowledge, with regard to a thousand and a thousand enquiries, certainly shew that we are not extremely exalted in the scale of intelligent agents. Our liableness to death is a mortifying and affecting circumstance, especially when it is surveyed as the mark and fruit of sin. Above all, our transgressions call for our sincere and deep humiliation. Our transgressions are the result of our own folly and perverseness: they entail the foulest disgrace and deformity upon us; they endanger, and, if persisted in, destroy our honour, peace, and final salvation. We should, therefore, be filled with contrition on account of them. There is nothing more hateful to the Deity, or against which he hath expressed himself with greater seve-

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rity, than pride. Lowliness of heart is recommended to us by the precepts and the example of Jesus; it is most ornamental to our character as men and as christians; and will be found the truest method of raising us to distinguished glory and felicity.

Secondly, We should admire the divine condescension, in taking so much notice of such imperfect and undeserving creatures. This thought, as is evident from the text, had a powerful effect upon the mind of David, and it should have a like effect upon each of our breasts. Notwithstanding our weakness, notwithstanding our unworthiness, the Ruler of the universe hath not esteemed us below his regard. He exercises over us his guardian care, provides for our support, preserves us in danger, and relieves us under our distresses. He does these things in a multitude of agreeable and charming instances, which we might dwell upon with the utmost pleasure. Above all, his compassion to us as sinners shines with mighty, with eminent, with unparalleled lustre. We had become grievous transgressors, and were exposed to a sentence of destruction: but did
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our Maker leave us in this deplorable condition? No, he entered into the most gracious measures in order to promote our highest felicity. He hath commissioned our divine Master to free us from ignorance, to recover us from iniquity, to form us into a spiritual life, and to render us the heirs of a blessed immortality. An admirable and glorious scheme indeed! a scheme which demands all our gratitude, admiration, and affection. Particularly, it should engage us,

To lay hold on the mercy that is offered in the New Testament. The survey of our weakness should not damp our ardor after exalted attainments. On the contrary, it should inspire us with an ardent desire to have our defects removed, and our souls brought into a better condition. On this important business we should enter with the greater earnestness and courage, as we are furnished with such excellent helps in the Gospel.

Animated by the consciousness of them, let us act with vigour and fortitude. Let us shake off the infirmities and vices of our frame, as much as possible, at present; and

thus let us become prepared for shaking them off everlastingly in the future world; that world where nothing but knowledge, purity, joy, and immortality, can be admitted. Once more,

Since we are such weak and offending creatures, we should exercise a mutual benevolence, and allow for each other's errors and frailties. This is an obvious lesson, that may be drawn from our imbecility and imperfection. Are we so dependent ourselves? Do we require so much help from our fellow men? We cannot, then, deny the same relief and kindness to *them*, when they stand in need of our beneficent and tender offices. Are we all guilty of many miscarriages, and liable to frequent failings? How absurd, how cruel, how impious, therefore, must it be, to be uncharitable, censorious, and severe! We should be humane, candid, and forgiving: we should be ready to throw a veil over the faults of our neighbours and our friends; considering that we, also, might greatly suffer, if our neighbours and our friends should refuse to exert the like charity in our favour. The iniquity of judging our brethren

brethren with harshness will appear in the more odious light, if we reflect upon the conduct of our heavenly Father and our blessed Saviour. God is a Being of consummate rectitude and purity; no moral evil can possibly approach him; and yet he hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our transgressions. “As a parent pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him: for he knoweth our frame, he remembreth that we are dust *.” Our Saviour, amidst the sharpest trials, and the strongest temptations, never departed from his integrity: he always continued spotless, amiable, and good; and yet, when he found his disciples sleeping, during his agony in the garden, he could graciously say, “The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak †.” How absurd and vicious, then, would it be for us, who have so many infirmities and offences to answer for, to condemn, with rigour, the deficiencies of mankind! The proper subjects for the exercise of severity, are our own frailties, and our own transgressions. These we

* Psalm ciii.

† Mark xiv. 38.

should

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should mark with the strictest eye, and allow them no quarter. In the behalf of these, we ought never to plead, but should watch diligently against them, and endeavour wholly to subdue them; while to the errors of others we are tender-hearted, forbearing, and placable. This is the true excellence of the christian temper; and God grant that, in the discharge of such a temper, we may be trained up for his heavenly kingdom! Amen.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N III.

The DIGNITY of MAN.

PSALM VIII. 4, 5.

*What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
and the son of man, that thou visitest him?
For thou hast made him a little lower than
the angels, and hast crowned him with
glory and honour.*

IT cannot be denied, that there are many subjects which admit of being considered in very different, and even opposite, lights; that they have a dark and a bright side, and that it is often exceedingly useful to behold them on the dark, as well as on the bright, side. This, for instance, is the case with regard to the question concerning the present state of man. It is highly proper and serviceable to take a survey of our ignorance, infirmities, and transgressions; for such

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such a survey tends to inspire us with the sentiments of a just humility, and to impress several valuable instructions upon our minds. But, though this is a profitable and an affecting, it is not altogether an agreeable, employment. It must, in some degree, be painful to recount our weakness, our frailties, our evil passions, and our crimes; and though we ought to know, and to feel, the whole of the truth, yet we cannot, surely, avoid being grieved at the prospect of our folly and wickedness. You will, therefore, I hope, attend me with satisfaction in the prosecution of my subject, which leads to a more pleasing view of things than could possibly be given the last time we treated upon it.

In the introduction to the discourse before delivered from the text, we observed that it has been the usual error of those who have attempted to delineate human nature, to consider the matter only in a partial light. Numbers have carried the idea of our abilities and dignity to a prodigious extent, while others have set forth the constitution of the mind as entirely base and contemptible,

We took notice that both these representations are guilty of an undue extreme, and that this extreme is never found in the sacred writings, which display the mental frame in its different and its proper colours. As an evidence of our assertion, we appealed to the text; which authorises us,

First, to describe the dark side, or the imperfection, of our present state: and, secondly, to survey our bright side, or the honour and glory with which we are invested.

We have already gone through the first division of our subject; and now proceed,

Secondly, to survey the bright side of the human frame, or the honour and glory with which we are invested.

And, here, the first thought, and the lowest circumstance we can mention, is, that however mean we may, in fact, be, we are not beneath the care of our heavenly father. This is plain from the whole of his conduct towards us. If we look back upon our past lives, we shall find that we have had the protection, and enjoyed the goodness, of the eternal God. Indeed, none of
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his works are excluded from his regard. He provides for every species of animals, and doth not permit the most insignificant of them to fall to the ground, without the concurrence or direction of his providence. But, besides being under the divine guardianship, in common with the rest of the creatures, man is distinguished by the peculiar supplies with which he is favoured, and the peculiar attention that is shewed to his welfare. The inferior creation seems more immediately intended for his use and benefit. The sun shines, the rains descend, the winds blow, the earth yields her increase, and the sea gives up its stores for *his* advantage. It is true, that the same objects which promote *our* felicity, contribute, likewise, to the felicity of the myriads of birds, and beasts, and fishes, that people the air, the ground, and the waters: but then this is done in subordination to the children of Adam, and with a particular reference to their profit and enjoyment; the animals themselves being supported and nourished with a principal view to our service.

The honour and glory with which we are crowned,

crowned, appears not only in our being more largely provided for than other creatures, but is, especially, manifested in our being appointed rulers of this inferior world. This is a circumstance which the psalmist hath a direct regard to in the text, as is plain from the subsequent verses. "Thou madest him," saith he, "to have dominion over
" the works of thy hands ; thou hast put
" all things under his feet ; all sheep and
" oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the
" fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea." Thus is man invested with the sovereignty below, and every living species subjected to his government. By uniting his power and skill, he can render the different parts of nature subservient to his purposes. He makes use of the rivers, the ocean, the winds, and the ground, to carry on a thousand schemes in the arts, manufactures, and commerce. As to the animals of the earth, they evidently acknowledge him for their monarch, and give themselves up to his management. The peaceful flocks resign their wool to clothe him, and their flesh to feed him. The herds offer up a like sacrifice. The stately
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horse submits to his directing hand, and conveys him wherever he pleases. Nay, there is no creature, however wild, but what may be made to bow down under our yoke. The combined strength and sagacity of the human race, can bring all the winged tribes, all the monsters of the ocean, all the fierce inhabitants of the desert, to subjection. Indeed, the dominion of man is apparent in every view. He alone is endowed with reason and foresight; he alone can form regular plans, and carry them into execution; he alone is capable of directing and controlling this inferior system, so as to cause each part of it to concur in effecting his designs, and promoting his happiness.

Another circumstance mentioned in the text, is that we are a little lower than the angels. Many orders of these beings, as we have before shewn, must move in very exalted spheres, and be vastly superior to us in dignity and attainments; and they all of them, according to our best conceptions of the matter, stand high in knowledge and excellence. Nevertheless, it is expressly asserted, by the psalmist, that the station assigned

assigned us by our Maker is not greatly beneath the station of some of the spirits who surround the divine throne. What David hath said, must chiefly be considered as declaring what we are when we answer the original purpose and formation of the Almighty, and not as what we are in the state to which we have reduced ourselves, by our follies and transgressions. Taking this thought along with us, it is evident that we are next in rank to the celestial host; the next in the chain which reaches down from infinite perfection to nothing. We seem to be, in fact, the link that joins both worlds together. In several respects we are united to the brutes, and in other respects we are united to the noble army of the celestial regions. The account which is given in the text, is strongly confirmed by the assertion of our Saviour, that the righteous shall hereafter be as the angels of God in heaven; an assertion which plainly shews the near relation we stand in to these illustrious beings, and that we are intended to constitute a part of their divine society.

We shall now go on, more particularly, to

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represent the attainments and improvements of which man is capable, and from which it will appear, that he is crowned with honour and glory. It is a melancholy circumstance, that in this survey we shall rather be obliged to describe what mankind were designed for, and what they might have arrived at, than what they really are. They were created in the image of their Maker, but they have sadly disgraced and deformed this image. They have, in a great measure, lost it by vice; and, in some persons, it is exceedingly defaced, so as to be scarcely discernible. It is not, however, totally and irrecoverably gone. Like the remains of a mighty and beautiful temple, the traces of their original grandeur are still visible; and it may still be restored, by proper care, and the aids of the gospel. It is, in fact, maintained in many instances; for there are numbers who so attend to the cultivation of wisdom and piety, who improve so well the moral and spiritual advantages they are favoured with, that they obtain a resemblance to the blessed God, and become adorned with a genuine dignity.

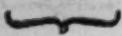
We may observe,

First, that the bright side of our frame, or the honour and glory we are invested with, will be apparent, if we consider the knowledge of which we are capable. That the present state of our knowledge is, in a variety of respects, extremely limited and imperfect, we have already seen. Nevertheless, much may be acquired by a diligent application of our powers and opportunities; as much, at least, as is necessary to our true happiness, both temporal and eternal. We are not, indeed, deeply acquainted with the causes of things; but then we are acquainted with a multitude of useful facts, and this is sufficient to the purposes of life. With relation to facts, our prospects may be very extensive. The collected wisdom of man, in particular, may rise to a great height. Single persons could not, perhaps, of themselves, and without assistance, make any mighty progress; but the united labours of the children of Adam may go a long way. The circle of our views may be much enlarged by gathering together the observations and improvements of ages. We might here lead you to the numerous discoveries that

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have been made in the arts and the sciences; we might mention a vast variety of subjects which the human mind hath studied with success; but our business at this time is chiefly with the knowledge of religion. The knowledge of religion is a matter of the highest possible excellence and importance, and our capacity for the attainment of it constitutes our distinguishing, our supreme glory. It is true, that we can by no means arrive to a full comprehension of the nature of God, his works, his ways, and his dispensations; but then we may arrive to such a degree of acquaintance with his existence, perfections, and government, as will be fully sufficient to answer every valuable end, fully sufficient to exalt our conceptions of the Almighty, to ennoble our mental frame, and to lead us to our genuine felicity. It is, especially, in our power to be informed, in the clearest manner, concerning our duty, interest, and future expectations. All mankind, by a due exertion of care and attention, might acquire such a measure of understanding as is requisite, in some degree, to guide and regulate their conduct.

conduct. Provision is made for this in the faculties of their minds, in the sense of right and wrong implanted or formed in their breasts, and in the administrations of Divine Providence. But by the help of revelation we rise to far greater and wider prospects. It is revelation that hath principally, I had almost said, solely, conduced to enlighten the world in religious matters; and, were it closely studied, it would have a wonderful effect in opening our eyes, and in bringing us to just and sublime views concerning subjects which are of infinite, of everlasting, importance. Would we see what the real dignity of our nature is, with regard to our capacity for knowledge, we must look to those who have diligently improved their faculties, by the several methods which Providence hath appointed, and, especially, by a diligent study of the gospel of Christ; and then we shall be convinced that, in this respect, we are crowned with honour. We shall be convinced that, notwithstanding our ignorance and weakness, it is no inconsiderable degree of wisdom which the favour of our Maker hath put it into our power to obtain.

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Farther, the glory we are invested with is evident from our being qualified to make distinguished advances in holiness and goodness. Inward piety and virtue are the things that constitute our true excellence and lustre; and rational sentiments concerning religious objects are principally serviceable to us, as they contribute to direct and purify the heart. That we are formed by the blessed Deity with an ability of acquiring the most lovely and valuable moral accomplishments and graces, reflects great splendour on our frame; and it would have been happy indeed, if our actual progress in devotion, integrity, sobriety, and benevolence, had been equal to what we might have made, by a faithful exertion of our endeavours, in conjunction with the gracious assistances of our heavenly Father. Nevertheless, taking mankind as they are, there have always been some who have asserted and maintained their dignity, by acting in a worthy and honourable manner. The faculties we are endowed with have not been useless, but have been, more or less, attended to and improved in every age of the

the world. There hath been no period in which there has not been a number of amiable and virtuous characters. Thus we perceive in the Old Testament, that when the prophet Elijah imagined the whole nation of the Israelites, himself excepted, to have fallen into idolatry, he is told by Jehovah that there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Little as the advantages were which the heathens comparatively had, immersed as they were in ignorance and error, can we suppose that they were all of them totally degenerate? No, several excellent persons were found among them; some who were a peculiar honour to their common nature, and whose names history hath transmitted down to us with singular glory and applause. Must there not, likewise, have, undoubtedly, been a multitude of others, whose lives and actions were not so conspicuous as to have a place in the public annals of the countries they belonged to; but who, notwithstanding, spent their days in cultivating and maintaining the most laudable dispositions and conduct? For let it be remembered that true goodness is silent

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and peaceful, doth not shew itself in noise and parade, or seek for empty acclamations.

To come to revelation, though its effects have not been so extensive and prevailing as might be wished, yet they have certainly been very considerable.

If we have recourse to the Old Testament, shall we not meet with the accounts of a variety of illustrious saints, who were the lights and the ornaments of the respective periods in which they flourished? As to christianity, was not the efficacy which it had, about the season of its propagation, extraordinary and noble? Were not myriads and myriads formed by it, at that time, to the sublimest heights of devotion and holiness? Did not vast multitudes become shining patterns of every lovely grace, and hold forth to the world a striking demonstration how beautiful the human nature may be, when it is purged of its weaknesses and corruptions, and restored to the image of God? Succeeding ages did, indeed, sadly degenerate; but still I am persuaded that our sacred religion hath always, even in the darkest

darkest periods, had its influence in preserving large numbers from the prevailing wickedness of the times, and in cherishing within them the principles of a spiritual life.

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This, too, is undoubtedly the case in our own day. There are many persons that do not entirely answer to the standard of the gospel, who yet have various good qualities, and are, upon the whole, extremely amiable. But where the revelation of Jesus operates in its full force, there it is clearly seen to what an elevation of dignity we are capable of being exalted. Blessed be God, there are characters that adorn the doctrine of their Saviour in all things. There are characters that are animated with a warm affection to their heavenly Father, their benevolent Redeemer, and their fellow creatures; who maintain the dispositions of piety, integrity, and charity; who possess a noble superiority to the world; who are pure, peaceable, meek, resigned, and magnanimous; whose passions are kept under the strictest regulations, and their views directed to the grandest objects; in short, who are continually growing in every divine attainment,

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attainment, and acquiring a nearer and nearer likeness to the eternal source of excellence, perfection, and felicity. Need I ask whether such characters do not exhibit the splendour of our frame in the fairest point of view? I need not ask it: your own hearts have already determined the question?

Again, it will appear that Jehovah hath crowned us with honour, if we reflect that he has conferred upon us the gift of immortality. Whatever knowledge we might obtain, whatever virtues we might rise to, yet, were our knowledge and our virtues to be totally lost at death; were the grave to bring an utter end to our existence, and to all the improvements we had made; must it not be owned that, in such a case, our glory would be prodigiously diminished? Would not a doom of this kind cast a dark shade *indeed* upon our lustre; nay, would it not wholly destroy it, and reduce us, at last, to a level with the brutes? It is the consideration of our living through eternal ages, and *that* only, which secures our genuine grandeur. Not to mention the presumptions in favour of a future state which may be

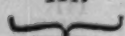
be alledged from the powers of the mind, and from several arguments, it is rendered certain, from the declarations and evidences of the New Testament, that we are designed for an endless being; and, surely! this is a circumstance that invests us with a mighty dignity. What! shall we survive the globe on which we dwell, and the sun that shines over our heads? Shall we survive a thousand and a thousand material systems? Shall we absolutely exist FOR EVER? Great, unspeakably great, is the privilege bestowed upon us?

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But this privilege will appear abundantly more exalted, when we reflect on the progressive nature of the faculties of the soul, and that in the celestial regions we shall be always increasing in knowledge, in goodness, and in happiness. When millions and millions of years shall have passed on, we shall not have arrived to the summit of our glory. We shall still be advancing in the scale of beings, shall be approaching nearer and nearer to the Supreme mind; and eternity itself will see us mounting higher and higher
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in perfection and felicity. How sublime is the thought! how magnificent the prospect! What shall we be? What shall we be indeed? I am struck with astonishment when I contemplate upon the subject, and tremble at the greatness of the thought.

But, besides the particular circumstance of our being the heirs of eternal life, it is apparent, from the whole scheme of our salvation, as displayed in the gospel, that God hath crowned us with honour. The whole scheme of our salvation exhibits both our meanness and our greatness in the strongest colours. It displays our meanness, as it would not have been necessary, unless we had debased ourselves by our transgressions. And is it not, at the same time, a striking proof of our greatness; since it shews that we have been distinguishingly the objects of the divine care, and that our Maker deemed us too considerable a part of his creation to be totally lost? If our recovery from ruin had not been a matter of high importance, he would not have entered into such extraordinary measures

measures in our behalf. Can we imagine that the Father of mankind would have formed so mighty and extensive a plan, that he would have rendered all the civil revolutions of the world subservient to the accomplishment of it, that he would have carried on a series of preparatory dispensations and prophecies, and that, at length, he would have given up so perfect a character as that of the Lord Jesus Christ, to ignominy, to suffering, and to death, unless there had been ample cause for such great designs and events? We cannot suppose it; and, therefore, we may appeal to any understanding, whether there was not an original dignity in the human mind, when it could, even in its sinful state, excite so strongly the compassion of the Almighty, and induce him to pursue such wonderful measures for its welfare. Is not the scheme of our salvation a manifestation, likewise, of our grandeur, as, in consequence of it, we are raised to advantages and privileges vastly superior to what we could, otherwise, have attained? By the scheme of our salvation, we are invited to brighter honours in this life, and to a nobler felicity in

SERM. in that which is to come. Our hopes of
III. immortality are more certain and joyful, and
 the immortality itself is more illustrious.

When, therefore, we consider what man was intended to be, and what he may be, by proper care; when we reflect on the knowledge and graces he is capable of, and which he sometimes attains; when we remember that he will exist for ever, and eternally increase in wisdom, perfection, and happiness; when to this we add, that God, in the system of the gospel, hath manifested such an earnest solicitude for our salvation, we shall be enabled, in some measure, to perceive the bright side of our nature, and shall be sensible that one soul is infinitely more valuable than ten thousand material worlds, though adorned with all the beauty and magnificence which infinite power and skill can bestow.

And now, as an improvement of this part of our subject, let us be thankful that so honourable a station is assigned us, among the divine works. Pride, which is a restless passion, and a passion that can never be satisfied, would, perhaps, incline us to wish
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that we had stood higher in the scale of beings than the Almighty hath thought proper to place us. But we are so far from having any reason to complain, that we have abundant cause for gratitude. Doth not the good conferred upon us vastly counterbalance the evil to which we are necessarily liable? Are we not surrounded with mercies too numerous to be reckoned up, or expressed? Are we not invested with the dominion over the beasts of the field and the forest, over the birds of the air, and over the fishes of the sea? Is not the earth, with its various productions, subjected to our use and our management? Are we not endued with a capacity of knowing a multitude of objects, and even of knowing our heavenly Father, our duty below, and our everlasting interests and expectations in the realms above? Are we not formed with an ability of resembling, as well as knowing, the great Creator? Are we not made only a little lower than the angels? Is it not owing to our own folly and wickedness, if we do not possess the dispositions of piety, righteousness, and benevolence; if we do not rise to
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all the glories of immortality, to all the eternal blessings promised in the gospel? Must it not, therefore, behove us to offer up our ardent praises to God for the honour with which he hath crowned us? Surely, the more we reflect upon his benignity, the more we shall be disposed to celebrate his name.

Again, we should be solicitous to act suitably to the dignity with which we are invested. This is a consequence that no one could fail to deduce from the subject, and which must be felt, at once, by every mind. If our heavenly Father hath graciously been pleased to fix us in so high a station, must it not be incumbent upon us to support the credit of the station wherein we are placed? If we have the least spark of a laudable ambition, if we have any sense of the privileges conferred upon us, we shall be studious to preserve the rank that is assigned us in the creation. But how is this to be performed? Why, it can only be performed by our diligent improvement of the advantages put into our hands. It can only be performed by our care both

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to know and to do the will of God. We should endeavour, by the aids of christianity, and the assistances of divine strength, to cultivate spiritual wisdom and attainments. It should be our solicitous concern to grow in piety, in purity, and in charity; to follow whatever is excellent, lovely, just, and becoming; to obtain an elevation of spirit above the temptations and the terrors of the present world; to maintain a sacred connection with our great Creator, and our blessed Saviour; and THEN we shall not merely keep up our dignity in this life, but advance to infinitely superior honours in the eternal word.

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I shall beg leave just to mention, that, as one part of the pre-eminence bestowed upon us is the dominion over the various animals of the earth, we should be careful to exercise this part of our dominion in a becoming manner. The brutes are given up to our use, but not to our barbarity. We ought, therefore, to behave to them with a gentleness that shews us to be only their lawful monarchs, and not their tyrants. While we consider them as our subjects,

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we are bound to provide for their welfare. To treat with cruelty the horse, the sheep, the ox, and the other creatures that render us so many important services, would be a base misapplication of our power, and is alike condemned by reason and scripture.

Once more, how dreadful is the conduct of those who deprive themselves of the great things for which they were intended! We are designed for knowledge and holiness, for immortality and glory; but numbers forfeit these mighty, these invaluable acquisitions, and yield themselves a prey to folly, vice, and ruin. What words can sufficiently express their stupidity and madness? For the sake of the most contemptible gratifications, they give up their noblest hopes and prospects; they give up all that is valuable, sacred, and important. Such persons are often said to behave like the brutes; but do the brutes ever behave in so absurd a manner? Do the brutes ever act contrary to their nature? No, it is man alone that defeats the purposes of his formation; and brings upon himself ignorance, vice, and destruction,

struction, when he might have been a partaker of wisdom and piety, of endless honour, and of endless bliss. What deep, what complicated misery, do the incorrigibly wicked draw down upon their own heads! Are you not startled, my friends, at the thought of losing your illustrious expectations? Do you not tremble lest you should exchange the highest perfection and felicity for the most unutterable distress? I would flatter myself that you are afraid of nothing so much as forfeiting the dignity you were created for; that you are afraid of nothing so much as the being deprived of the splendour and happiness you were originally intended to possess. Be it, then, your concern instantly to flee from the approaches of vice, and to devote your faculties to the acquisition of spiritual knowledge and spiritual dispositions. May this be the concern of every one of us! Would to God that it were the concern of all the children of Adam without exception! Delightful and glorious would, in that case, be the state of mankind. They would honourably sustain, at present, the rank assigned them

SERM. by the Manager of the universe; and, at
III. length, would be united to the angels, in
the realms of complete and eternal blessed-
ness. Amen.

SERMON

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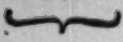
GOD'S GENERAL PROVISION for HUMAN
SUSTENANCE.

GENESIS XLVIII. 15. Latter part.

*The God who fed me all my life long unto
this day.*

WHEN we reflect upon our obligations to the Divine goodness, we shall clearly perceive that our chief, our highest, gratitude is due to our heavenly Father, on account of the spiritual mercies with which we have been favoured. As these mercies relate to the supreme perfection of our rational nature, and to our everlasting happiness, they ought to be esteemed by us above any thing that has merely a regard to our present welfare, and should excite in us a superior thankfulness to the Author of every enjoyment. But it doth not hence follow

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that temporal blessings should be forgotten by us. Forgotten did I say? So far should we be from forgetting them, that they ought frequently to be thought of, and should call forth our warm and affectionate praises to the Parent of felicity. Their number, their variety, their importance, require this at our hands; and, accordingly, we find that the wisest and best persons have, in all ages, been abundant in expressing their acknowledgments to their Maker for the care he hath taken of them, and the kindness he hath shewn to them, with reference to the life that now is. The passages to this purpose, which are scattered through the scriptures in general, and through the book of Psalms in particular, are extremely numerous, and the transcribing of them would fill up a long space.

Nor ought we always to satisfy ourselves with incidentally and occasionally mentioning the obligations we are under to the Almighty for the terrestrial benefits he hath bestowed upon us, but should sometimes dwell upon them at large; that, by so doing, we may obtain a more distinct apprehension and conviction

conviction of the divine beneficence in this respect. Hence it is that I shall think myself justified in giving an entire discourse or two upon the provision which our gracious Creator hath made for the support of the body: and the words that have led me to the subject are those of Jacob in the text; which words are contained in the blessing poured out by him, a little before his death, upon Joseph and his two sons. The ancient patriarch, in the course of his benediction, characterizes Jehovah as the God who had fed him, during his whole life, unto that day; and it is probable that he has here an especial reference to the care which the Supreme Being had taken of him, when^{so} he went out from his father's house, not knowing whither he went. His solicitude on that account, a solicitude that betrays a good deal of selfishness, and which favours strongly of the temporal covenant, to which alone his thoughts seem to have extended, you will find recorded, Genesis xxviii. 20, 21. And how amply he was provided for, we learn from the great quantity of cattle and other possessions which he

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brought with him from Haran, when he returned to his own country; from the magnificent present he was enabled to make to his brother Esau; and from his own testimony, chapter xxxii. 10. "For with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands."

Perhaps the wandering state of men in the early ages of the world, before the earth was properly cultivated, might render them more sensible, than *we* are apt to be, of the importance and value of having food to eat, and raiment to put on. But be *that* as it may, *we* have equal reason to reflect, with gratitude, on the conduct of our Maker, in having fed us all our lives long unto this day.

Accordingly, I shall take occasion, from the words of the text, to consider the displays of the Divine benevolence in furnishing us with the means of subsistence, and shall endeavour to improve the subject.

In order to our being the more thoroughly sensible of the displays of the Divine benevolence in furnishing us with the means of subsistence, I shall, in the first place, give

some view of the general provision which God hath made for us in the course of his creation and providence, and then survey the matter in a more personal light.

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First, let us contemplate on the general course of creation and providence, and the subserviency of things to our support. What a goodly scene is exhibited to our admiring eyes! How is the ground, at the proper seasons, clothed and adorned with verdure and beauty! Is it not clothed and adorned with as much verdure and beauty as if the sole purpose of the Almighty had been to afford us a pleasing prospect; while, at the same time, the objects that charm us are as useful as they are agreeable? How large is the quantity of herbs, and roots, and vegetables that contribute to our nourishment! If we take a walk into the gardens that surround us, shall we not behold them plentifully stored for our benefit? Shall we not see one set of plants rising up, in due order, after another, and, in their several weeks and months, presenting themselves to our tables? The entertainment they yield is as innocent and healthful as it is grateful to
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the taste; and they administer a virtuous luxury, in which there is usually little danger of excess.

May not the same be asserted with regard to the produce of the various trees which grow in such numbers out of the earth, and add so much lustre and ornament to its surface? It is not merely to amuse the eye that they display their beautiful blossoms, their green leaves, and their spreading branches; but to offer, at length, a rich abundance of fruits, amazingly diversified in their kinds and their flavours, and admirably adapted to the different parts of the year, and the different climates of the globe.

But in nothing is the vegetable goodness of God more apparent, than in his covering the ground with corn, and especially with wheat. We know that wheat furnishes a food of all others the most substantial and durable; a food that is perpetually necessary, and which can never satiate; so that bread is considered in scripture, with equal truth and elegance, as the staff of life. Now the benevolent Deity seems to have made it the object of his peculiar attention, to supply

ply the wants of his creatures in this respect. He graciously recorded a promise, in the very early ages of the world, that seed-time and harvest should not cease, so long as this frame of things subsists; and how gloriously has the promise been fulfilled, down to the present day! At each returning season the grain is thrown into the bosom of the earth, and at each returning season it rises up in a plentiful crop. When Jehovah blesses the springing thereof, when he crowns the autumn with his mercy, how do the little hills rejoice on every side! How do the valleys sing, because they are loaded with such a rich treasure! Most beautiful and pleasing indeed, is the aspect which the ground assumes; and the eye of the husbandman shines with transport, when he beholds the noble success which the Supreme Being hath granted to his labours.

Nor is the care that God hath taken for our subsistence confined to the vegetable productions; but is amply displayed, likewise, in the various animals which he hath formed for our use, and intended for our support. Hath he not ordered the ox, the sheep,

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sheep, and other creatures, to yield up their lives at our demands; and, that they may be fitted for affording us an agreeable and a strengthening nourishment, hath he not commanded the grass to spread its fine covering over the pastures? Yes, the grass grows for the cattle, as well as herb for the service of man; and, while the grass grows for the cattle, it grows, at the same time, for *our* benefit; since *we* reap the principal advantage that arises from the abundance with which it adorns the earth. The brutes are, indeed, rendered happy, in partaking of the plenty which surrounds them; but they are subservient to our necessities, both while they live, and when they die

Nor is it to one element that the animals which contribute to our sustenance are limited. The rivers and the seas offer to our acceptance the mighty stores of fish with which they are crowded; and the air gives up its winged inhabitants.

But it is not only in the solid food which the Almighty has provided for us, that he hath manifested his concern for our subsistence.

sistence. Our solid food could not be digested, or converted to our nourishment, without a proper mixture of fluids. Hence our heavenly Father hath opened a thousand refreshing springs and fountains, to allay the thirst of man. Nor is it the limpid stream alone which furnishes the cooling and the grateful draught, but many objects beside. What a delightful and healthful beverage flows in the milk of the cow! What an agreeable entertainment does the infusion of water upon a variety of herbs produce! Besides the liquids of a more simple nature, hath not God been pleased to bestow others upon us, which are peculiarly calculated to strengthen the body for labour, and to revive and exhilarate the fainting spirits? Thus a wholesome and valuable drink is drawn from certain kinds of grain, and especially from barley. Thus the juices compressed from a number of fruits are highly useful and refreshing; and this is particularly the case with the juice of the vine. Wine, when used with prudence and moderation, hath, in all ages, been considered as a pleasing and beneficial gift of Providence; and it is spoken of with approbation,

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approbation, in that view, by the sacred writers. It was recommended by St. Paul to his beloved Timothy; and we read, Judges ix. 13. that "it cheareth the high and the low, princes and common men;" for so the original words ought to have been rendered, and not "God and man," as our translators have absurdly done; a version which hath administered occasion to much idle and profane ridicule.

Thus we see how amply our heavenly father hath stored the creation with the materials that were requisite for our subsistence; and can it have escaped our notice how *richly* and *elegantly* he hath taken care of our accommodation? Not content with furnishing one or two plain things, which might have sufficed for our sustenance, without containing any diversity to gratify the palate; he hath spread around us a wonderful copiousness of agreeable productions, which have all their different tastes and flavours: so that it is evident that he hath consulted our pleasure as well as our profit, and hath graciously implanted appetites within us, adapted to the different relishes of
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our food, that hence we might receive with delight what is essential to our support.

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The same variety is observable with regard to our clothing, a circumstance which, though not directly mentioned, is undoubtedly included in the text; because, in all civilized countries, clothing is a necessary part of the provision which is made for us in this inferior state. How could we exist, unless we were defended against the inclemencies of the weather to which we are exposed in most climates, and especially at certain seasons of the year? Now, the mercy of our Maker hath abundantly followed us in this respect. He hath ordered the plants and animals of the earth to furnish us with garments. Hence the flax and the cotton invest us with a neat, a healthful, and a grateful covering. Hence the beaver gives us a defence for the head, and the skins of the ox and calf, a protection for the feet. Hence the sheep resigns its annual load of wool, to be wrought into a surprising diversity of dresses. Hence the silk-worm spins out its own bowels, to supply a fine and graceful ornament to persons who occupy the

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the more genteel and advanced stations of life. And is it not evident that, in all these things, our heavenly Father did not only intend that we should be guarded against the beating storm, and the pinching cold; but that we should appear in a more or less elegant and splendid garb, according to the ranks and circumstances in which we are placed?

We may here mention, as closely connected with the subject of our reflections, the beneficence of our Maker in providing us with suitable habitations. For this purpose he hath created the different kinds of trees for timber, and hath placed quarries of stone in the bowels of the earth. He hath, also, afforded us the materials which are requisite to give cement, strength, convenience, and beauty to our buildings.

It ought not to be omitted, with respect to the several particulars we have touched upon, that the ability and skill which God hath bestowed upon men, of working up the materials of nature for their use, should be reckoned among the brightest proofs of the benevolence he hath displayed in his care for
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our present subsistence. It is true that he hath shed a thousand blessings upon us; that he hath enriched us with innumerable gifts of his bounty: but, that we may reap the full benefit of them, he demands the concurrence of our own activity, diligence, and labour. He puts the means of support and happiness into our hands, and it lies upon us to bring them to maturity and perfection. It is *our* duty to dress the gardens, and to cultivate the ground: it is *our* duty to sow the seeds of vegetables, to plant the trees, and to lodge the corn in the earth: it is *our* duty to work up the flax, the cotton, the wool, and the silk, into a decent attire, and to convert the wood and the stone into proper dwellings: it is *our* duty to extract the ores from their beds, to purge them of their dross, and to work up the various metals to a thousand purposes of necessity, utility, or pleasing ornament. Nor are we the less, but the more, indebted to the goodness of our heavenly Father on these accounts; for he hereby calls forth our wisdom, industry, and vigour; and engages us in a multitude of employments which highly contribute to

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SERM. the beauty, order, and felicity of life.
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Hence it is that man becomes closely united to man, that communities are formed, and that the intercourses of trade and commerce are established. Hence we derive the advantages and pleasures of civility and refinement, together with a number of important and endearing social connections.

There are, likewise, many other circumstances which shew the kindness of our Maker in providing for our subsistence; and it would be criminal, on this occasion, to forget the variety of the seasons, and their admirable subserviency to our welfare. In the spring, all nature rises up, as it were, from the grave; revives with innumerable charms, and holds forth the buds, the blossoms, and the pledges of plenty. The summer ripens various useful productions, and, by its fervent and salutary rays, carries others greatly forward toward their state of maturity. Autumn completes the promises of the spring and the summer, and crowns the year with the richest displays of the divine bounty. *Then* it is that the copious grain is cut down in large heaps; *then* it is that the solid and durable

urable fruits are brought to perfection ; and then it is that the husbandman enjoys, with unspeakable gladness, the full reward of his watchful care and his painful toils. Thus a noble store is laid up for our wants, in the time when the earth shall be divested of its verdure, abundance, and lustre ; and shall assume a barren, frowning, and desolate appearance. Let us not, however, imagine that the winter is unfavourable to our support. Winter contributes to the designs of our Creator's mercy as effectually as the more blooming and smiling seasons. Winter affords a necessary repose to the exhausted ground, strengthens its vegetative powers, and, while it binds it in frost, or covers it with snow, prepares the way for the future harvest.

The distribution of the weather is a farther circumstance, which amply displays the benignity of the Almighty, in providing for our necessities. Doth he not sometimes command his sun to shine for days and weeks with all its force, in order to give heat and vigour to the productions of nature ; and, at other times, does he not send the gentle

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showers, or the plentiful rains, to relieve the parched and thirsty lands, and to clothe them with the utmost beauty and fruitfulness? Now, all this is done in such a manner, and with such proportions, as are most truly conducive to our interests, though the foolish children of Adam are apt to complain, and to wish that the dispensation of serene skies, or the falling drops, were in their own hands; a complaint and a wish that we ought the more to be ashamed of, since the heathen world was so thoroughly sensible of their absurdity; as is manifest from the well-known apologue of the peasant, who requested, from Jupiter, the management of the seasons with regard to his own farm.

Nor can we sufficiently admire how exactly the Supreme Being hath adjusted the gifts of his bounty to the demands of his creatures, and how regularly he continues the produce of the earth, and the various tribes of animals; so that nothing fails of appearing in its appointed time, but a new succession is continually rising up, to supply our returning wants.

It is proper for us, likewise, to observe
how

for Human Sustenance

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how nicely our food is adapted to the constitution of our bodies. Our heavenly Father hath filled our provision with juices the most suitable to our nourishment, and hath formed our corporal frames in such a manner as shall best enable them to receive and digest these juices. The operation of the Almighty in this respect does, indeed, exhibit a surprizing demonstration of wisdom and benevolence; and, were we to enter into a philosophical account of it, it would strike us with amazement.

Thus I have laid before you some reflections on the general course of creation and providence, and the subserviency of things to our support. I might now proceed to consider, in a more personal light, how graciously God hath fed us all our lives long unto this day: but, so numerous are the thoughts which offer themselves upon the subject, that they will afford sufficient matter for another discourse; and, therefore, I shall conclude, at present, with an improvement of what has been already said. And it cannot be denied,

First, that the blessings I have mentioned

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demand from us the sincerest returns of thankfulness and affection to our bountiful benefactor. It is with evident gratitude, and with a lively sense of the divine interposition and goodness, that Jacob speaks in the text concerning the subsistence he had received from the hands of his Maker : and is it not equally natural, and equally reasonable, that *we* should magnify the name of the Lord, for bringing “ food out of the earth, and “ wine that maketh glad the heart of man, “ and bread, which strengtheneth man’s “ heart *?” A feeling of obligation to those who have conferred favours upon us, is a principle implanted in our breasts; and, while we exert it towards our terrestrial friends and protectors, shall we suffer the grand Parent of felicity to be forgotten? Let nothing so shameful and odious be asserted concerning the dispositions of our minds. Who is there that deserves our praises and our love, if the great Author of our enjoyments doth not deserve them?

Be it also remembered, that by cultivating devout and grateful sentiments towards the Almighty, on account of his temporal

* Psalm civ. 14, 25.

mercies,

mercies, we shall turn these mercies into spiritual ones, and employ them as the instruments of promoting our immortal salvation. By leading us to God, they will be sanctified in the noblest manner, and will qualify us for superior benefits hereafter. A happy and desirable art must it, indeed, be, to convert earthly blessings into the means of advancing our everlasting welfare! Let us then sing unto Jehovah as long as we live; let us be deeply sensible of his beneficence; and be engaged by it to offer him the tribute of real affection, of uniform and chearful obedience.

Secondly, let us be careful that we do not abuse the gifts of the divine bounty to the purposes of intemperance and excess. What are the ends for which our gracious Creator hath so amply provided for the support and accommodation of our bodies? His ends undoubtedly are, that we may pass through the present state with greater comfort and pleasure, and that we may be fitted for the more important duties incumbent upon us; the duties of piety, justice, and charity; the duties that relate to the true perfection and

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happiness of our nature. Nothing could be farther from the intention of the Supreme Being, than that we should place our whole felicity in corporal gratifications, and make eating, and drinking, and sleeping, the principal business of our existence. Yet there are numbers who seem to fix all their thoughts on the indulgence of their appetites; who mind earthly things, in the lowest sense of the phrase; whose God is their belly; and who give way to the most contemptible gluttony. There are numbers who tarry late at their cups, who drink till the wine inflames them, and they have lost their understanding, discretion, and virtue. But what can be more shameful and abominable than such a conduct? Is it not a disgrace to reason and humanity? Is it not a monstrous misapplication and perversion of the gifts of Heaven? Is it not flagrant ingratitude to the Author of our enjoyments? Does it not convert those blessings into the means of our temporal detriment, and our future condemnation, which were bestowed upon us to sweeten our passage through our journey below, and to help us forward in the path of salvation?

salvation? Let us, then, be solicitous to use the good things of this world so as not to abuse them. Let us use them with decency, with temperance, with moderation. Thus shall we derive the truest pleasure from the participation of them, and shall employ them in that manner which will be acceptable to our Almighty Benefactor.

Once more, Let us rise up in our meditations from the food that relates to our bodies to the food which relates to our souls. It is the exhortation of our Saviour, that we should not labour for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, and which he, the Son of God, will give unto us; and it is an exhortation that demands our serious and earnest attention and obedience. Extremely gracious hath our celestial Father been to us in providing for our present wants; but infinitely more gracious hath he been in providing for our spiritual necessities, and, especially, in sending the Lord Jesus Christ upon the earth for that purpose. Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ hath appeared, and hath set before us excellent and divine entertainment

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tainment indeed. His doctrine is the living bread which came down from heaven, and if any man eat of this bread he shall never die. Shall we, then, despise or neglect such rich, such glorious, provision? No, we shall not do it, if we have the least regard for the support, the health, and the welfare of the highest and noblest part of our nature. Let us ardently apply to the instructions of our great Master, digest the sacred truths he hath delivered, and convert them to our eternal sustenance. Let us so nourish ourselves with the doctrines and discoveries, the precepts and examples, the motives and prospects of our holy religion, as that we may grow up to the stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus. And may the powerful influences of the Most High bless the salutary food of the Gospel, in such a manner to the strength and vigour of our souls, that we may live to God at present in the spirit, and live with him for ever in the celestial mansions! Amen.

SERMON

S E R M O N V.

GOD'S PERSONAL PROVISION for HUMAN
SUPPORT.

GENESIS XLVIII. 15. Latter part.

*The God who fed me all my life long unto
this day.*

IF we have made any observations upon
ourselves, or upon our fellow creatures,
we cannot be insensible that it is extremely
natural and pleasing to mankind to take a
survey of their past lives, and to expatiate
on the incidents which have befallen them;
and this is especially the case, when they
have gone through important and difficult
scenes. Those persons, in particular, who
have been concerned in public commotions,
or experienced extraordinary dangers, dwell,
with a wonderful delight, on the great ac-
tions they have beheld, and the dreadful
perils

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perils, they have escaped. The soldier will not soon be weary of recounting the battles he hath seen, the sieges he hath assisted at, the wounds he hath received, the adventures he has met with, and the glory he has acquired; or the sailor with telling the naval engagements he hath shared in, the strange countries he has visited, the tempests he hath weathered, and the hardships he has endured. So it is, likewise, with regard to the other situations in which we have been placed; and even those whose mortal journey hath been checquered with very little variety, have a satisfaction in acquainting their friends with the events they have been witnesses to, though there may have been nothing in the events themselves that was peculiarly interesting or curious.

But this disposition is as useful as it is natural and pleasing; and it is no small evidence of the wisdom and goodness of the blessed God, that he hath implanted it in our breasts. In consequence of it, occasion is given for enjoying a number of agreeable social hours, and for raising many fine sympathies, which tend to strengthen the moral feelings.

feelings. By this means, also, a thousand valuable instructions are conveyed to our fellow creatures. Hence it is that young persons reap the advantages which arise from the experience of their elders; are taught what they may expect to meet with in life; are informed of a multitude of things which it behoves them to do, or to avoid; and have a noble emulation excited in them, which is extremely serviceable both to themselves and to the world.

As this propensity to enlarge on past facts is beneficial, in general, to the children of Adam, so it is particularly beneficial when it is rendered subservient to the purposes of piety; when incidents are related in such a manner as to lead us into just ideas of the divine providence and government; and to inspire us with grateful sentiments to the Supreme Being, on account of the riches of his mercy.

This is the temper which is clearly discovered by the Patriarch, in the text, and in the verses connected with it. While he describes the support he had received, and the care that had been taken of him through
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the whole of his existence, he does it with evident sensations of devotion and gratitude to that eternal Jehovah, who had provided for him, and conducted him in his various ways. Let us attend to the language he uses, and observe the pleasure with which he dwells upon the idea of his Almighty friend and benefactor; so that he seems unwilling to quit the subject, though it is no more than occasionally introduced; "GOD, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk; the ANGEL who redeemed me from all evil; the GOD who fed me all my life long unto this day."

In the discourse that has already been delivered from these last words, I proposed to consider the displays of the divine benevolence in furnishing us with the means of subsistence. And, in considering the displays of the divine benevolence in this respect, I was naturally led to offer some view of the general provision which the Supreme Being hath made for us in the course of his creation and providence, and then to survey the matter in a more personal light.

The thoughts that crowded upon me permitted

mitted me only, in the former sermon, to give a view of the general provision which the Supreme Being hath made for us in the course of his creation and providence.

I now proceed to consider the affair of God's having fed us all our lives long unto this day, in a more personal light. And here I may justly begin with what so strongly excited the admiration of David, even the beneficence of our heavenly Father in forming and sustaining us before we were born. "I will praise thee," saith the royal author, Psalm cxxxix. 14, 15, 16, "for I
" am fearfully and wonderfully made; mar-
" vellous are thy works, and *that* my soul
" knoweth right well. My substance was
" not hid from thee, when I was made in
" secret; and curiously wrought in the
" lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes
" did see my substance yet being unperfect,
" and in thy book all my members were
" written, which in continuance were
" fashioned, when as yet there were none
" of them."

Such was the language of this devout and sublime poet; and have not ~~we~~ equal reason
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to adopt the same language? Have not we equal reason to contemplate, with pleasure, with surprize, with gratitude, the exquisite agency and workmanship of the Almighty, in adjusting the frame of our bodies, in carrying them forward to perfection, in breathing into us the breath of life, and in supporting and nourishing us till we were fitted for appearing in the world?

Were we to display, at large, the conduct of our Maker in this respect, a fine scene would be opened to a philosophical mind: but, as the distinct consideration of the subject would lead us to several circumstances rather too minute and abstracted for a discourse from the pulpit, let us direct our view to the period in which we first visited the light of the sun; and from that period to the present moment we shall find ample cause to admire and to adore the kind care which our celestial parent hath taken of our welfare.

Man, indeed, at his birth, and for a great while after it, is the most helpless of all the creatures that dwell upon the face of the earth. The young of other animals are generally

generally soon capable of providing for themselves; but a course of years must be completed before it can be in *our* power to contribute any thing material towards our subsistence. Let us not think, however, that our situation is the worse on this account; since, on the contrary, it is far the better. The long state of dependance we are in prepares us for the offices and satisfactions of social life, and for enjoying, in a thousand instances, a happiness much superior to that which is possessed by the brutal species. As to our feeble condition, it is more than compensated for by the strong affection to their offspring which is implanted in the breast of every father and every mother. God hath not left so important a matter, as the feeding and the training up of the human kind, to the cool dictates of reason, but hath urged parents to the full discharge of their duty by the stimulations of an instinct which is prodigiously more speedy and forcible in its operations than any deliberate arguments could possibly be. This instinct ties us to our children with irresistible energy, and en-

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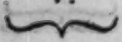
gages us to perform all kind offices for them, with an unspeakable delight. It would not be easy to describe the various feelings of paternal and maternal tenderness, and the pleasing effects it produces. Let it suffice to observe, that, in this way, the Supreme Being hath taken ample care to nourish and support us during the helpless years of infancy and childhood.

But what becomes of those little ones who have the calamity of losing their fathers and their mothers in early life? Are *they* left in a situation that is entirely abandoned and desperate? Far from it. A gracious Providence still watches over them for their good. Our earthly parents may die, and may leave us in circumstances that are extremely uncomfortable; but our heavenly Parent is always the same, and his power and benevolence will not fail to bring us the necessary relief. For this purpose he hath implanted in the hearts of men a strong affection, not for their own offspring merely, but for the offspring, likewise, of those with whom they are connected by the ties of blood; so that many of us,

who have been deprived, it may be, when young, of the immediate authors of our existence, have had their places happily supplied by near relatives, who have treated us with a paternal or maternal regard. Nay, a love for children in general operates forcibly in the human breast, so that none are entirely forsaken, however deplorable their condition may be, and however destitute they are of friends to support them. Is not the tenderness, in particular, which prevails in the female sex towards all infants, a principle of wonderful influence and usefulness? Does it not engage *that* sex to perform, with pleasure, every kind office for them, and to contribute, effectually, to the preservation and nourishment of the helpless little ones who are daily coming into the world?

As the goodness of God is thus displayed in the care which he takes of us when we first begin to exist, so it is, farther, manifested in the methods he hath pointed out for fixing us in proper stations of life. The affection of our parents is not confined to the years of our childhood, but reaches a

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long way, and hath a mighty efficacy in promoting the happiness of maturer age. Are they not extremely solicitous that, when themselves shall have descended to the mansions of the tomb, the welfare of their offspring may be continued; and do they not endeavour to render this welfare as great and durable as they possibly can? Do not numbers hence derive inheritances which put them above the necessity of taking any pains for their subsistence; and are not others hence conducted to the professions and employments which will enable them to secure their comfortable support and accommodation? That some should originally be placed in affluent circumstances, is a beautiful instance of the Divine wisdom, as provision is hereby made that there shall be a set of persons who may occupy those higher ranks which are necessary to the purposes of government. It is an equally beautiful instance of the Divine wisdom, that the generality of mankind should not be maintained in this way, but by the exertion of their own diligence. Were all the sons of Adam possessed of wealth, who could be
found

found that would be willing to perform a thousand services which are essential to the existence and benefit of society? But the Supreme Being, by appointing a diversity of situations, and by leading us to those which are most suitable to us, provides for our being furnished with food, and clothing, and dwellings; and, at the same time, promotes the general welfare of the world.

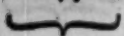
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The more effectually to carry on the schemes of his benevolence, he hath implanted different talents and inclinations in men, and hath given them different opportunities of selecting their condition. Hence some are fitted for active, and others for retired occupations; some for public, others for private, life; some for works of ingenuity, and others for works of labour; some for the exercises of the body, and others for the exercises of the mind: and God calls us to our several employments by the means of our parents, relatives, and friends; or by unexpected incidents, and particular turns of genius and disposition, which cannot be controlled.

When the Almighty hath directed us to proper stations, and we are instructed in the

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business of our professions, his goodness continues to be displayed in pointing us to convenient settlements. Much of the wisdom and mercy of our Maker may be seen in this respect; as our capacities would be useless if we were not fixed in such a manner as to be able to exert them. Various are the ways which Jehovah hath taken in order to place us in the situations that are most conducive to our support and advantage. Doth not, very frequently, the calling in which our fathers, or our near relations, are engaged, lead us to a natural, an easy, and almost sure method of providing for our own subsistence? Do not, sometimes, unexpected patrons and encouragers of our abilities start up, and help us greatly forward in the journey of life? Nor is it uncommon for Providence to carry us to countries and habitations quite remote from all our early connections. We set out, perhaps, as Abraham did, when "he departed from the land of Haran, not " knowing whither he went;" but the benevolence of the Almighty conducts our wandering steps, and directs us to comfortable and useful abodes. Indeed, it is admirable

nable to observe, how much the general benefit of society is hereby promoted. Individuals have often nothing in view besides their own maintenance and accommodation; but while they are hence urged to particular enquiries, studies, labours, and employments; while they are hence excited to traverse the different parts of the globe; they become the instruments, in the hands of God, of spreading the arts and sciences, of contributing to the civility and refinement of the world, and of advancing the order and perfection of the universal system.

But the kindness of the Supreme Being, in feeding us all our lives long unto this day, is not only visible in his having led us to proper settlements, but, likewise, in the assistance he hath afforded us, when we were exposed to extraordinary difficulties. We need not say that persons are not always equally successful in the stations wherein they are placed. We know that human life is subject to a multitude of changes, revolutions, and evil accidents; and that the worthiest characters, without their own fault, may be brought into the depth of distress. But still the up-

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right have that God for their friend who hath promised that he will never leave or forsake his faithful servants. Their heavenly Father opens a way for their relief, and appears for them when things seem to be at the worst. Several of us, it may be, have experienced the goodness of our Maker in this respect. Several of us, perhaps, have met with discouragements and hardships which were almost ready to fill us with despair: but hath not Jehovah graciously interposed in our favour? Yes, Jehovah hath, again and again, graciously interposed in our favour. He hath not suffered us to want what is needful; he hath upheld us to the present moment, and will continue to uphold us.

While we are considering the benignity of the Almighty in taking care of our support, we ought not to omit the compassion which is manifested by him in the preservation, or restoration, of our health. Health is a matter of infinite importance, not only, as without it we can have no true enjoyment of the blessings of life, but, likewise, as, with regard to the bulk of mankind, it is absolutely necessary in order to enable them to discharge the employments

on

on which their subsistence depends. That God doth, in general, grant so much strength and vigour, and so much freedom from sickness, as he usually doth, to the labouring part of our species, is a fine and beautiful instance of his benevolence. Had it not been for his mercy in this respect, how could vast numbers, and their families, be kept from the most pressing difficulties?

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It deserves, also, to be remembered how much we are indebted to our gracious Creator, for speedily raising us up again, when we have been confined to the bed of indisposition. He it is who hath provided proper remedies for us, who hath given them their healing influence, and hath restored to us the ability of executing the duties of our different stations. Nor are the poorest utterly forsaken, even when they are visited by those lingering disorders which deprive them, for a long time, of the means of getting their bread. Their heavenly Father surveys them with an eye of tenderness, and either puts it into the hearts of particular persons to relieve them, or furnishes them with public places of reception, where their diseases

SERM. ^{V.} diseases may be attended to, and their wants supplied.

And now, upon the whole, as it is impossible to describe the situations and circumstances of individuals, let us apply the general observations that have been offered, from the text, to our own cases; and contemplate, with satisfaction, the riches of the Divine goodness towards us. Let us recollect, with suitable dispositions, the various ways in which a kind Providence hath sustained us, hath conducted us, and hath upheld us to the present moment. Let us call to mind the peculiar experiences we have had of our Maker's mercy in times of extraordinary trial and difficulty; and let us so reflect upon these things as to be filled with the warmest sentiments of gratitude and affection to our benevolent Creator. How strongly his benignity, in feeding us all our lives long unto this day, demands our thankfulness, we have seen in our former discourse; and, therefore, we shall proceed to some other remarks, which result from what hath been said. And,

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for the future, in that Being, who hath hitherto supported us. Have we not, in every respect, the best ground for this sacred, this agreeable, confidence? Have we not abundant reason for it, when we consider the nature of God: for are not his kindness and compassion such as to encourage our firm belief that he will not leave his children utterly destitute? Have we not abundant reason for it, when we look to the promises of holy writ, which assure us that the righteous shall not want any necessary thing? Have we not abundant reason for it, from the multiplied experience we have each of us had of the tenderness of the Most High? With such encouragements, therefore, would it not be wrong, would it not be criminal, to give ourselves up to despondency? Whatever difficulties, whatever trials, whatever distresses we meet with, we ought not to despair of relief. We should still, humbly and patiently, hope that the Almighty will appear in our behalf.

But let us remember with what dispositions, and with what conduct, we are to place our trust in the eternal Jehovah. The only

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only just and lawful method of placing our trust in him, is to be found in the way of our duty. We must not be slothful and idle, and *then* presume that God will interpose in our favour. The exertion of our own industry, and a careful improvement of the advantages and opportunities that are put into our hands, are the means which the Supreme Being hath appointed for our support; and if we neglect them, we shall forfeit all title to his protection. It is incumbent upon *us* to do *our* parts; it is incumbent upon us to act with diligence in our respective professions and employments; and in that case we may chearfully refer the event to our heavenly Father, who will either smile upon our endeavours, or, if they do not succeed, will open some other path for our subsistence.

Secondly, so long as we are furnished with the necessaries of life, we ought to be easy, satisfied, and thankful, though we are not surrounded with affluence and superfluities. All we can assure ourselves of, from the Divine character and promises, is, that we shall meet with proper sustenance. God
has

has not engaged to gratify the whole of our wishes, or to place us in those circumstances of splendour, rank, and wealth which our vanity, pride, or folly might desire. Indeed, this would be absolutely impossible with regard to the bulk of mankind. By far the larger part of the children of Adam must occupy the lower stations, devote themselves to labour, and possess only the common supplies and conveniences of existence. Provided, therefore, we are favoured with these, we have no reason to complain; agreeably to the advice of an inspired apostle, who informs us that, "if we have food and raiment, we ought therewith to be content *." It will be sufficient to the purposes of real happiness, that we are decently supported; and, in that case, may we not have as much enjoyment and pleasure as the persons who are encompassed by riches, pomp, and a numerous attendance? Nay, may we not exceed them in genuine tranquillity and satisfaction of mind?

Besides, we ought to remember that the present world is not our whole, or our principal, inheritance. We ought to remember

* 1 Tim. vi. 8.

that

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that we are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, and that we are journeying forward to an eternal state. We are candidates for immortality, disciples of Jesus, and heirs of unfading life. To us belong the adoption, the covenant, and the promises, in a far nobler sense than they did to the Israelites; the adoption, the covenant, and the promises of the New Testament, which are infinitely superior to those of the Old. With such honours, therefore, in possession, and such hopes in prospect; numbered as we are among the children of God, and the brethren of Christ, and looking for a crown of glory which cannot wither, what could be more mean, what more absurd, than to be anxious for wealth, parade, and grandeur below? Well may we be satisfied with a moderate, or even a small portion of temporal good, when we have the invaluable blessings of the Gospel to delight our souls, and to render us substantially happy.

Thirdly, it behoves us to contribute, whatever lies in our power, to the assistance and relief of our fellow creatures. By so doing we shall imitate our heavenly Father, a
resemblance

resemblance of whom is the highest dignity and perfection to which our rational natures can attain. As far as human infirmity will admit, we should study to copy after all the moral attributes of our Maker; but we should especially study to copy after his kindness and compassion, because by that means we shall be like him in those things wherein his distinguishing excellency consists. Is it not the unlimited benevolence of the Deity which stamps the worth upon, and adds the charm to, his infinite power, presence, knowledge, and wisdom?

Shall we not, also, by an imitation of his mercy, have the honour of working together with HIM for the support of mankind? One principal method which he takes for the subsistence of the human species, is his appointing us to be the mutual instruments of each other's welfare. Ought we not, therefore, to carry on, with diligence, with ardour, the gracious purposes of Divine providence, and do our utmost to supply the wants, and to promote the comfort, of our fellow mortals? Nor should we exert ourselves in favour merely of our offspring and

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and near relatives, but in favour of all to whom our influence may extend; and, especially, we should ever be willing to contribute something out of our substance to feed the hungry, and to clothe the naked. Were I to enlarge on the arguments which urge us to such a disposition and conduct, how numerous, how forcible would they appear! But it must suffice to observe, that, by assisting and relieving those around us, we shall co-operate with our great Creator, fulfil his beneficent intentions, act an illustrious and amiable part, exhibit the spirit of the Gospel, and shew ourselves to be the genuine disciples of Jesus, and the genuine children of our Father who is in heaven.

Lastly, Let us remember, that, notwithstanding the kind provision which God has made for our present accommodation, this life is no more than a transitory scene, which will quickly be past. The care which the Almighty takes of us below, is not that we should dwell here for ever, or that we should expect our whole portion on this side of the grave. His design is that we may
be

be fitted for discharging the duties of our stations, and have the opportunity of preparing for an eternal state. Notwithstanding the supplies and the protection he affords us, it is his own wise, and we may add gracious, appointment, that we shall speedily come to a dissolution. It is *his* decree that the most salutary food shall not uphold our bodies in perpetual vigour, or the most efficacious medicines finally prevent the approaches of death.

Ought we not, then, to keep our last end continually in view? Ought we not to direct our principal attention to moral, to spiritual, to celestial objects? Are we not called upon, in the strongest language, to improve our frailty and mortality to the purposes of our endless salvation? Yes, if we have any regard to our substantial, our durable felicity, it will be our grand concern to secure an interest in the invaluable benefits which the Saviour hath displayed in his Gospel. God grant that we may each of us be persuaded to make this our chief, our earnest business! and, in that case, we need not be greatly anxious about present accommodations

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modations and events. If we be favoured with an abundance of the good things of life, we may use them with thankfulness, and look up from them to better blessings hereafter; or, if we be poor in this world, yet we shall have the divine consolation of reflecting that we are rich in faith, rich in the noble and ravishing promises of the New Testament, and heirs of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which cannot fade away. Amen!

SERMON

S E R M O N VI.

GOD'S OMNISCIENCE and MORAL GOVERNMENT.

HEBREWS IV. 13.

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight ; but all things are naked, and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

AMONG the various motives by which the practice of goodness is recommended, none are so forcible, none so well calculated to produce a solid and lasting effect, as those which are drawn from a consideration of the blessed God. There is no view of the divine nature but what, if properly reflected upon, will have a prevailing tendency to make us abound in righteousness and piety. For instance, what a number of affecting arguments to engage us in

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God's Omniscience and

the cultivation of universal holiness, may be collected from the benevolence, the mercy, the compassion of our heavenly Father! What strong inducements will a survey of these delightful perfections of the Divinity afford us to repentance, gratitude, devotion, trust, love, imitation, and obedience!

Nor are his benevolence, mercy, and compassion the only attributes that are fitted to have a moral and spiritual influence upon our hearts. All the other properties of the Supreme Mind will be found very efficacious, in bringing about the same end. His consummate rectitude proclaims to us the absolute necessity of possessing a real purity of disposition. His impartial justice tells us that we shall be treated according to our works: his veracity fixes our dependance on his declarations and promises: his power calls us to trust in his support, and to dread his displeasure: his wisdom directs us to refer ourselves to his guidance, and to acquiesce in his dispensations. And doth not the contemplation of his being perpetually near us, and perpetually beholding our actions,
words,

words, and thoughts, impress several awful and useful lessons upon our souls? Accordingly, this subject is often set before us in scripture, with a practical purpose, as is plain from many passages, and particularly from the text. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked; and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." In treating upon these words I shall consider, first,

The view which they give of the divine presence with us, and the knowledge that God has of our temper and conduct; and, secondly, observe, that he surveys our behaviour with an intention of calling us to account.

I am to consider, first, the view which the apostle hath given us of the divine presence with us, and the knowledge that God hath of our temper and conduct. And the language he has used will appear, upon examination, to be extremely forcible and striking; "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight." There is nothing in the whole compass of the crea-

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ation that is hidden from him ; nothing but what is entirely and fully under his inspection. " All things are naked before him ;" stripped of every possible disguise, and exposed in their true colours. " All things are opened unto his eyes." The term here translated opened, is a metaphor borrowed from the ancient sacrifices, which were killed and cut open by the priest, and their entrails laid bare, that hence he might discern the omens that were favourable, or unfavourable, to the person who offered the victim. As the inwards were then displayed, and their true state, with respect to soundness or corruption, discovered ; so doth our Maker behold, in the exactest manner, our internal condition : he beholds it with a clearness which cannot be deceived. The text includes, both the universal presence, and the universal knowledge of the Supreme Being ; two attributes which, when considered in a moral light, will be found closely connected together ; and we shall reflect a little upon each of them.

That the Deity pervades all the works of his hands, that in him they live and move,

is a truth which flows from his nature ; for it necessarily follows from his being eternal, and independent, that he must be infinite, that he must extend through boundless space. Besides, as he created whatever there is which exists, he must certainly be where his productions are. The same doctrine is, likewise, deducible from the support which is afforded to the system of the world ; for it is evident, from several arguments which we cannot now stay to enlarge upon, that the system of the world would be dissolved, unless it were upheld by its original Author. Indeed, the more we examine into the frame of the universe, the more we shall be sensible that God is every where, that his energy is the life of the creation, and that his influence is unlimited. The laws of nature are, in fact, nothing but his stated method of acting ; and therefore shew, by undeniable consequence, that his presence reaches through the whole compass of being. But we need not labour the proof of this point, because, if we believe at all that there is a Maker and Governor of heaven and earth, we shall believe that he is omnipresent.

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Moreover, the sacred records have set this matter before us in a striking view. We might refer you to many passages, on this head; but it will be sufficient to desire that you would read, at your leisure, the hundred and thirty-ninth psalm, which will completely verify what we have asserted.

But the divine knowledge is as extensive as his presence. This is the circumstance that is more immediately and peculiarly described in the text. It is justly reasoned, in holy writ, "He that planted the ear, shall not he hear? He that formed the eye, shall not he see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know *?" The cause must undoubtedly be superior to the effect; and, therefore, since intelligence is diffused through various ranks of creatures, the original source, from whom these creatures derived their existence, must be completely intelligent. Indeed, it is impossible to take even a transient survey of this mighty fabric that surrounds us, without entertaining the highest and most admiring idea of the boundless capacity of the Supreme Mind.

* Psalm xciv. 9, 10.

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The prodigious orbs that roll over our heads, the earth we tread upon, the immense ocean, the hills and valleys, the rivulets and streams, the flowers and fruits, the birds and beasts; in short, all the things we behold, and infinitely more than we can behold, rose into order at his command. Now, what consummate skill, what unfathomable wisdom, is displayed in them! There is an art in the formation and composition of every the minutest object, which will baffle the penetration, and excite the wonder, of the profoundest philosopher; and the more we look into the divine works, the greater pleasure we shall have in tracing their matchless contrivance. What then must the Author himself of these works be? What indeed! Words, and even our conceptions, fail us, when we attempt to say what he is. As the prophet Isaiah expresses it, "there is no searching of his understanding *." The Being who formed the world, who disposed the materials it consists of according to his sovereign will, and who appointed the laws by which the system of nature should be directed and governed,

* Isaiah xl. 28.

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cannot but be entirely acquainted with his own productions.

If we have recourse to the scriptures, we shall perceive that they abound with sublime representations of this attribute of the Divinity. "Such knowledge," saith the royal psalmist, "is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Thine eyes did see my substance yet being unperfect, and in thy book all my members were written *." "Who," asks Isaiah, "hath directed the spirit of Jehovah, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment?" "Behold, the former things are come to pass," saith God, "and new things do I declare: before they spring forth, I tell you of them †."

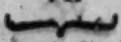
The universe is open to the view of the blessed Deity. This thought is distinctly expressed in the text; for the original word is a word that signifies the whole compass both of material and spiritual existence: and how great will this thought appear, when

* Psalm cxxxix. 6, 16.

† Isaiah xl. 13, 14. xlii. 9.

we take into consideration the immensity of the creation ! The discoveries of modern astronomy have given us reason to believe, may have rendered it certain, that there are worlds beyond worlds, in an extent which utterly exceeds our imaginations. Should we permit our fancy to range from system to system, we could not stretch our thoughts to the limits of the divine works. The divine works, for any thing we can assuredly say to the contrary, may be absolutely boundless ; and boundless though they should be, they are, notwithstanding, open to the discerning eye of the Supreme Being. He is present with them ; he surveys the whole and every part of them with an exactness that nothing can escape.

His intelligent offspring, in particular, are without number. The universe is filled with inhabitants, and there may be degrees of them, and multitudes of these degrees, which are entirely beyond conception. But be their multitudes and degrees what they will, let them rise to ever so astonishing a height, still they are perfectly known to the Supreme Mind. Their various capacities,
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their concealed thoughts, their respective improvements, their real characters, are penetrated at once, by his infinite understanding.

But descending from these speculations, which might engage our attention till we are lost in amazement, let us bring the matter practically home to our own breasts. Be it, then, considered by each of us, that all our own actions are naked before him with whom we have to do. There is nothing we can perform that can possibly be hidden from his searching view; nor doth it make any difference whether what we perform be transacted in the broad sunshine, or the most secret shade. "The darkness and the light are both alike to him." The deeds that we might be able to conceal from the inspection of our fellow creatures cannot escape his notice. Though the plunderer of the treasure committed to him should be so successful as to defraud without detection; though the vile adulterer should invade his neighbour's bed with the utmost privacy; though the base assassin should securely stab, under the covert

vert of the night; though these wretches should execute their detestable schemes without being discovered by mortals like themselves: yet they cannot elude the eye of that God who looks through every disguise. All our conduct is perceived by him, and perceived in its true colours.

Nor are our words exempt from the same strict survey. Whatever our lips declare, though we should speak in the lowest whisper, sounds as loudly to him as the voice of the strongest thunder. The half-formed sentences that we fear even to utter to our own hearts, are understood by him in their full meaning.

Nay, our most secret sentiments stand open to the view of our almighty Creator. As there is not a word in our tongue, so there is not a thought in our souls, but lo! he knoweth it altogether. He penetrates into the inmost recesses of the breast, and brings to light the things that are lodged in its most hidden chambers. He is thoroughly sensible to our latent passions, our private purposes, our concealed wishes; is acquainted with the springs by which our
minds

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minds are actuated; and comprehends the desires that we hardly dare utter even to our own imagination. No subterfuges can be of any avail in his sight; for he searches the reins and trieth the hearts of the children of men. He beholds our downsitting, and our uprising, and understandeth our thoughts afar off. He compasseth our path, and our lying down, and is intimate with all our schemes and doings.

Nor is the knowledge of the blessed God the effect of conjecture, or reasoning by deduction and inference, but intuitive and perfect. As it is infinitely superior in degree, so it is infinitely superior in kind, to the knowledge of human beings, or to the knowledge of the most exalted intellectual spirits. He sees at one view the whole chain of causes and effects; alike surveys the past, the present, and the future; and reaches from eternity to eternity, in a single glance.

We now proceed to observe, secondly, That God takes notice of the conduct of his rational offspring, with the intention of calling them to account.

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This sentiment is also expressly declared in the text. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked, and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." *With whom we have to do.* The original is, "with whom we have an account, with whom we are to reckon for our behaviour."

The bare consideration that such a Being is present with us, and perpetually knows our dispositions and actions, might, one should think, impress us with reverence, with awe, and with caution, though we had no proof that he would hereafter summon us before his tribunal, and reward or punish us according to our works. However, this circumstance, that we shall be called to the divine bar, is the circumstance that gives the proper and full weight to our meditations on the divine inspection.

That the Almighty doth behold our ways and our doings, as a moral governor, and that he beholds them with the purpose of treating us according to our characters, is evident from the strongest arguments. The certainty of this truth may be drawn from the
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the nature and perfections of our great Creator. We are well assured, that he is completely pure and holy; that he is removed at an infinite distance from every degree of moral deformity in himself, and that he cannot approve the least degree of it in others. Nay, so far is he from approving iniquity, that it must be the object of his supreme aversion and displeasure. This, therefore, being the case, there can be no doubt but that he will make a distinction between those persons whose conduct is agreeable, and those persons whose conduct is not agreeable, to his own rectitude. His approbation and disapprobation cannot be indifferent things; but must display themselves in opposite effects. The approbation of God must be followed with very pleasing consequences to the men who are so happy as to be entitled to it; and his disapprobation must be attended with consequences proportionally dreadful. Even the mercy of our Maker, which is so fatally abused by many, as an encouragement to sin, furnishes a decisive proof that he will reward the righteous, and punish the vicious. His benevolence

benevolence engages him to promote the utmost possible felicity in his creation; but this can only be produced by the restraint and correction of wickedness; for unless wickedness be severely chastised, confusion, disorder, and misery would overspread the divine works, and the gracious intentions of the Deity be frustrated.

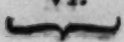
If we consult, likewise, our own powers, we shall trace in them the evidence of our being accountable creatures. Noble faculties and important capacities are bestowed upon us. Now, can we imagine that they were bestowed upon us for no purpose? Can we suppose that they were designed for no use; and that the Father of our spirits will be satisfied with our letting them lie dormant, and applying them to no worthy ends; or perhaps to base and abominable ones? We cannot suppose this without the greatest absurdity. The Almighty must have had certain views in placing us on the earth, and enduing us with the principle of reason; and he must expect our compliance with his views.

That we are formed for the cultivation of

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piety and virtue, and that God will treat us according to our behaviour in this respect, is plain, in a particular manner, from the sense of good and evil which is implanted in our breasts. We cannot avoid perceiving a beauty and an excellence in some dispositions and actions, and a deformity and hatefulness in others. When we have behaved according to the genuine dictates of devotion, justice, humanity, and charity, we feel a secret approbation, and a transporting gladness, rise up in the heart. On the contrary, when we transgress the laws of truth, righteousness, and mercy; when we indulge to selfish and corrupt passions, we are disgusted with ourselves, and are exposed to a piercing anguish of soul. The influence which conscience has to embitter, or to sweeten, our days, is powerful beyond expression; for thence it is that we derive either the most exalted enjoyment, or the most exquisite misery of life. What is it then, but the voice of God within us; who hereby proclaims himself our moral governor, manifests his present love for holiness, and his present aversion to iniquity, and

and gives us a strong foreboding of the appearance we must hereafter make before his awful tribunal?

If, likewise, we take a survey of the external course of things in the world, shall we not behold considerable proofs of the divine regard to the upright, and of his dislike to the wicked? Hath he not so established the constitution of nature, that, whether with respect to public societies or individuals, there shall be a tendency in virtue to produce their highest happiness, and in vice to cause their deepest misery? Have not the kingdoms that have been eminent for patriotism, sobriety, frugality, and religious principle, been eminent for their prosperity; while the communities that have been prevailingly debauched, luxurious, venal, and profane, have sunk into contempt and ruin?

As to single persons, do we not see, in numberless instances, that iniquity is fatal to health, fortune, reputation, comfort, and every thing that is valuable and noble; while real piety, temperance, integrity, and benevolence, often establish a sound constitution, and preserve a weak one; produce

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sometimes an affluence, and generally a competence of temporal possessions; gain the esteem and kind offices of our fellow creatures; and bring along with them a train of the sublimest enjoyments; enjoyments that, besides their own intrinsic pleasure, add a double satisfaction to the common blessings of life, and blunt the edge of the severest afflictions? Since, therefore, there are at present such clear marks of a righteous administration being carried on in the world, may we not rationally suppose that the same righteous administration will be carried on, and even rendered more illustrious and perfect, in a future state?

But the scriptures have set this important truth in the fullest, the most awful, and the most affecting light. In the scriptures we have a striking history of the dispensations of God towards his intelligent offspring, and of the manner in which he hath dealt, or will deal, with them. The writers of the Old Testament abound with a prodigious number of passages on this head, which are extremely animated and instructive; and they do, likewise, exhibit a

variety of examples and facts, from our Maker's treatment of the Jews, and other nations, which openly testify his moral government.

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But it is from the New Testament that we collect the most enlarged, express, and useful discoveries of the account we must render at the bar of the Supreme Being. There we learn the time, the circumstances, and the consequences, of this grand transaction. There we learn, from undeniable evidence, and with infallible certainty, that we must all appear before the tribunal of Christ, and receive according to the things done in the body, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil. There we learn that the Saviour will be displayed with inexpressible glory; that the whole human race, great and small, will be raised from the dead; that they shall be judged according to their characters; that the incorrigibly wicked shall be consigned to destruction; and that eternal life shall be conferred upon the righteous. We are told, again and again, in the sacred writings, that every man shall be rewarded according

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as his work shall be; and the same language seems to be frequently repeated, on purpose to impress the momentous truth upon our minds, with a weight and force due to its importance.

And now, from what has been said we may perceive the folly of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is infinitely contemptible and base; it is unworthy every idea of a generous and manly soul; and is odious in the sight of men, and in the sight of the Supreme Ruler. Our Saviour treats it with peculiar severity, and describes its malignity, as it was found among the Pharisees, in the most animated and alarming colours. We might, indeed, justly enlarge upon its iniquity; but, from what hath been offered, must we not see that it is as foolish as it is detestable? What is it that men can gain by assuming false appearances, and pretending to heights of devotion and goodness, when their genuine characters are entirely the reverse? Why, the utmost they can attain to, is to impose upon their fellow creatures; and even *that* is far from what they will always be capable of doing. In many cases, the most artificial disguises will

be penetrated; and the persons who have made use of them will only, in consequence of them, become the more despised, and the more hateful. But granting that they could thoroughly impose upon mankind, can they impose upon the blessed Jehovah? No, they cannot do it. He is incapable of being deceived, his eyes look through the thickest veil; he searches us, and knows our hearts; he trieth us, and knoweth our thoughts.

Whosoever, therefore, thou art that concealest corrupt and vicious purposes under the covering of an extreme sanctity, be persuaded to reflect on the absurdity, as well as on the enormity, of thy conduct. What doth it signify that, in the eyes of mortals like thyself, thou seemest to have a fair and goodly form? The advantages thou canst hence possess are but trifling, and will soon be over. In the mean while, God sees thee in thy true deformity; and the period too will speedily arrive, in which thy deformity shall become conspicuous in the sight of the assembled world; and thy delusions be found utterly unprofitable, vain, and shameful.

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Would it not, therefore, be infinitely wiser for thee, to substitute the reality for the appearance, the substance for the shadow?

Hence we see how strong a motive the consideration of the universal presence and knowledge of our Maker, and of his moral government, affords to the cultivation of inward goodness. There has, in all ages, been an unhappy propensity in men, even when they have had no hypocritical intentions, to rest in the externals of religion. They have been so weak as to imagine, that the Supreme Being is pleased with the false glitter of an outward worship; and hence they have paid a mighty regard to washings and fastings, to sacrifices and oblations, to particular days and seasons, with a multitude of other idle observances. But would not a due attention to the doctrine of the text correct this dangerous error? The blessed God penetrates our inmost recesses; our most secret thoughts are open to his survey; and he looks into the affections of our minds. Is it, therefore, to be supposed that he will be satisfied with less than the sincere veneration of the soul? Can we possibly

possibly believe that he will accept the service of our lips, or be delighted with a train of ceremonies, when, at the same time, we are void of internal and substantial worth? No, we may be well assured that the tribute of the heart will be the only tribute that can be truly agreeable in his sight; and for that reason, it should be our first, our chief, our most ardent concern to keep the heart with all diligence.

‘ Am I in the continual presence, and
‘ under the continual inspection, of the
‘ King of kings, and Lord of lords? Is
‘ there no action, no word, no sentiment,
‘ that I can be able to conceal from his
‘ survey? Doth he surround my lying
‘ down, and my rising up; my public ways
‘ and my hidden retirements? Doth he
‘ pierce through the springs by which I
‘ am actuated in my conduct? Doth he
‘ take notice of me, with the view of call-
‘ ing me to a solemn account, before his
‘ awful tribunal? O! may these truths
‘ sink deep into my breast, and influence
‘ my whole temper and behaviour! May I
‘ not dare to indulge corrupt desires and vi-
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cious passions! Let me not, in any temptation, consent to sin, since God is with me.' " Let me take good heed to my ways, and strictly regulate my inward principles and motives. Let me set Jehovah always before me; live as under his eye; and endure, and act, and think, as seeing him who is invisible!" Finally, The consideration of our Maker's universal presence, and knowledge, and moral government, affords great matter of comfort to his upright and faithful servants. We have seen that the Almighty beholds with satisfaction the integrity of the righteous, and will openly acknowledge and reward it, at the consummation of the world. If, therefore, we are numbered among the genuine votaries of piety and virtue, how high, how noble, is the consolation to which we are entitled! " If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God *." If our hearts condemn us not, we can truly rejoice in his perpetual inspection of us; because we are certain that he views us with pleasure and affection. In

* 1 John iii, 21.

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It does not unfrequently happen, that the worthiest persons have their sincerity called in question, and are loaded with false accusations. Their characters are traduced, the springs of their actions misrepresented, and their best designs are charged with evil meanings. Nay, sometimes their very adherence to truth, to honour, and to conscience, is the reason why they are vilified, and defamed, and persecuted. But, hard as this trial may be, will they not be capable of supporting it, when they reflect that the Supreme Being is acquainted with the real state of their minds? Yes, to him they can appeal with conscious innocence; on him they can rest their cause, and rely on his protection; secure in this, that he knows the uprightness of their hearts; that he will, in the great day, render it conspicuous before the assembled universe, and crown it with his final applause. We have, indeed, all of us, many deficiencies and transgressions, that may well strike us with awe, when we consider in whose presence, and
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under whose inspection we perpetually are. But this is our comfort, that he is not strict to mark what is amiss in us, provided that integrity be our ruling principle. It is his character to be compassionate to the failings of his humble servants; and he will even pardon the most flagrant iniquities, if they be truly repented of, and thoroughly forsaken. Of this we have the fullest assurance in the New Testament, as the apostle hath observed in the verses immediately following the text. "Seeing then that we have a
" great high-priest, that is passed into the
" heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us
" hold fast our profession. For we have
" not an high-priest, that cannot be
" touched with the feeling of our infirmi-
" ties; but was, in all points, tempted like
" as we are, yet without sin. Let us,
" therefore, come boldly unto the throne of
" grace, that we may obtain mercy, and
" find grace to help in time of need." Thus, if sincerity be the guide of our temper and our actions, we have nothing to fear, and every thing to hope, from the universal presence, knowledge, and moral government, of the
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the Deity. The universal presence, knowledge, and moral government of the Deity, are subjects that will, in that case, be matter of the noblest consolation, and inspire our souls with the most ravishing prospects. And God grant, that our dispositions and behaviour may be such as to rejoice in this important truth, that, "There is not any creature but what is manifest in his sight; and that all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Amen.

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S E R M O N VII.

THE USEFULNESS OF PRAYER.

JOB xxi. 15. Latter Part.

*And what profit should we have if we pray
unto him?*

THE principle of reason, by which we are rendered wiser than the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air, was undoubtedly given us for valuable purposes : and the chief of these purposes was, that, in consequence of it, we should be qualified for, and directed to pursue, the knowledge of our Maker, and the practice of universal goodness. But it is a melancholy consideration that this principle hath been so generally neglected ; that folly, vice, and passion have so much gotten the better of it ; and that it hath, in fact, become in a great measure useless, with regard to the grand end to which it ought to be applied. It is a still
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more melancholy consideration that it hath not only been neglected, but perverted to the most unworthy designs; that it hath been prostituted in the shamefullest manner; and been called in to the assistance and defence of iniquity and impiety. Such, however, is the case, that men have employed their rational powers in an opposition to the very intention for which their rational powers were bestowed. They have endeavoured to argue themselves into a disbelief of those first and fundamental truths which lie at the root of religion, and without which it cannot subsist.

As they have done this with respect to religion in general, so they have done it with respect to its several parts and branches. Thus the exercise of prayer has, in all periods, been exposed to the attacks of sceptical persons, and represented as an insignificant and needless service. That no advantage can proceed from it, hath been objected to it in early times; and the objection has been continued to our own age. Numbers there are, at the present day, who urge the same sentiment; and hence are led to encourage
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both themselves and others, in a total disregard to the important duty of which we are speaking.

I hope, therefore, that I shall not be unserviceably engaged, whilst I attempt to remove the difficulty that hath been raised on the subject.

As to the words of the text, we find that they are described, by Job, as the language of wicked men, when, notwithstanding their wickedness, they are surrounded with a large abundance of worldly happiness. "They
" say unto God, Depart from us; for we
" desire not the knowledge of thy ways.
" What is the Almighty, that we should
" serve him? and what profit should we
" have if we pray unto him?"

Whether these expressions were the result of any vain reasonings, which the impious characters here mentioned had fallen into; or whether they were barely the profane effects and overflowings of thoughtless and insolent prosperity, it is not material to determine. Our business will only be to furnish an answer to the last of the questions, that is proposed in the passage we have stated.

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In doing this, I shall endeavour to shew the usefulness of prayer, and, after that, to make a practical improvement of the subject.

I am to shew the usefulness of prayer. Were I to enter at large into the matter, much might be said concerning the internal propriety and fitness of our offering up our constant addresses and supplications before the divine throne. It might be proved that such a conduct is formed on the best principles of the human mind, and on all the relations we stand in to the blessed Deity; that it is one of the most natural testimonies of our regard to him, and one of the most natural returns we can make for his favours; and that the more it is reflected upon, the more just and rational a tribute it will appear. It might be proved that adoration and thanksgiving, which are included in this duty, are not to be numbered among the means, but are to be reckoned as of the very essence of religion; as what will necessarily belong to it, in its most exalted and perfect state, even in the heavenly world. †

But the view in which I am, at present,
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to treat of prayer is *that* of its being serviceable to ourselves, in our passage to the eternal regions. Now, the query is, whether it be, or be not, of real importance to have the sentiments and affections of piety and virtue steadily impressed upon the soul, so as to be maintained continually in habit and exercise. That this is a circumstance of real, nay of infinite importance, cannot, I think, be denied. On the prevalence of these sentiments and affections depend our honour, dignity, and happiness in this life, and our everlasting welfare and glory in that which is to come. If devotion, purity, integrity, and benevolence do not reside in our hearts, we must be alienated from our Maker; can have no title to comfort in our own breasts; must be deprived of the noblest satisfactions, and lose the inexpressible rewards, of the future state. In short, unless we are animated and governed by the fear and love of God, and by the principles of righteousness and goodness, we are objects of the divine displeasure, and exposed to a sentence of condemnation. Must not, therefore, whatever tends to promote the dispo-

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fitions and virtues with which our temporal and eternal felicity is inseparably connected, be proportionably valuable? Now what may be asserted concerning prayer is, that it is admirably calculated to produce these happy effects; and this will constitute the chief and turning point in the answer to the question proposed in the text. Let us then observe, in the first and principal place, that the grand thing which renders our addresses and petitions to the throne of Heaven highly advantageous to us, is the influence they have in exciting and strengthening the attainments and graces of the religious life. In this way will be raised our veneration, gratitude, love, and all the feelings of devotion that are due to the Supreme Mind. That we should exercise the utmost reverence, thankfulness, and affection to the great Fountain of perfection, and the great Author of our blessings, must be owned to be our indispensable duty. When we consider his transcendant majesty, his consummate excellence, his unlimited bounty, and our immense obligations to him; when we contemplate on the amiableness and glory of his infinite

infinite attributes, whether natural or moral; when we reflect how delightfully they are employed and displayed in our favour; must we not be conscious that it would be base and abominable in us to withhold from him the sentiments of respect, honour, complacency, and esteem?

As it would be extremely wicked to withhold these sentiments from the Father of mercies, it consequently behoves us to cultivate them in our breasts, by every possible method; and one of the most effectual methods of doing it is prayer. In prayer we offer up our solemn adorations to the Deity; acknowledge his powerful, wise, and gracious government; express our dependence upon him; look to him for the supplies, whether of a temporal or a spiritual kind, which we stand in need of; recount his favours; and celebrate, with joy, his boundless benevolence. Now, I may appeal to the human heart, whether such a service as this hath not a mighty tendency to encourage and keep up a devout and grateful temper in our souls. Are we not led, by the very act of homage that we pay,

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more closely to meditate on the divine perfections, on the benefits we have received from our Maker, and on the returns which are due to him; and must not, therefore, the performance of it be calculated to cherish and to quicken the feelings of real piety, veneration, praise, and love?

In the exercise of the same act of homage, we shall promote humility with regard to ourselves, as well as the best affections with regard to God. Humility is a grace of high importance in the religious life; extremely excellent in itself, and extremely favourable to the progress and improvement of our other virtues. It is at once an ornament and a defence to the mind; and accordingly it is strongly and particularly recommended, in sacred writ, as the foundation on which all our attainments in goodness must be built. Now, what is there which seems better adapted to raise it in our hearts, than prayer? Prayer necessarily engages us to reflect on the amazing grandeur and matchless excellence of the Supreme Being; on the vast, the unlimited, extent of his attributes; and

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on the infinite distance there is between him and us. We view the Ruler of heaven and earth in the splendour of his majesty, and we see ourselves as nothing before him. Can we, then, avoid being filled with lowly and modest sentiments? Can we avoid being filled with a deep consciousness of our own insignificance and meanness, when compared with our Almighty Creator? We cannot do it, if our addresses are, in any measure, made with a proper disposition.

Besides, we are hence led to consider ourselves, not only as creatures, but as sinners. In our addresses and supplications to the Deity, we call to remembrance our conduct towards him; we acknowledge that we have been guilty of numerous deficiencies, and survey our behaviour in all its deformity. Now, must not such a retrospect as this into our temper and actions, such a solemn confession of our errors and miscarriages, tend to humble us in the presence of our Maker, to inspire us with contrition, and to bring us to a true repentance for our iniquities? Repentance is a duty absolutely incumbent upon us, as trans-

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gressors; and without it we cannot be restored to the divine forgiveness and favour. It is, therefore, a strong proof of the usefulness of prayer, that it is calculated to excite that sorrow for our offences, that resolution against them, and that sincere reformation, with which our eternal hopes are inseparably connected.

As prayer is thus beneficial in the tendency it has to fill us with penitence, when we have been disobedient to the laws of the Almighty, so it is equally valuable in the tendency it has to preserve us from falling into temptation, and to render us steadfast in the paths of piety. Nothing appears more likely to prevent our running into the snares that beset us, than a regular application to our heavenly Father, for his direction and support. By habitually asking his assistance, and pouring out our ardent wishes to be possessed of the graces of the Christian character, we shall gradually strengthen our own vigilance, resolution, and fortitude. Were we, every time we are solicited to evil, immediately to put up an earnest petition to the Deity, imploring him to deliver

us from the allurements, and begging that we might maintain our integrity; we should, I am persuaded, find that such a practice would have a wonderful efficacy in establishing our virtues. Accordingly, hath not our Saviour exhorted us to pray, as well as to watch? Every act of homage that we pay to the Supreme Ruler, every request we offer to him, that we may be confirmed in righteousness, is an exertion of the soul that affords fresh strength to the virtuous principle, and gives us to be more immovable in the service of God. Hence is the purity of our intentions and dispositions increased. By conversing with so sacred and gracious a Being; by contemplating his excellencies; by celebrating his attributes, works, and ways; by seeking religious attainments at his hands, we draw off our affections from the vanities, follies, and vices of the world, and lead them to worthy, noble, and sublime objects. We become more refined, more heavenly, and more free from gross views and grovelling earthly passions.

Not our purity only, but likewise our benevolence,

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benevolence, is hereby promoted. One part of prayer is to intercede for our fellow creatures, as well as for ourselves. We solemnly acknowledge the relation in which we stand towards them, and intreat that the numerous blessings *we* have the felicity to enjoy may be extended in like manner to *them*. Now, do we not, by this acknowledgment, and by these intreaties, both express and cultivate, in our minds, the principles of love, kindness, and charity towards them? Do we not survey mankind in such endearing and engaging lights, as so united to us by the ties of the same common nature, or by the bonds of the same common religion, that our hearts grow more enlarged, and we are more disposed to friendly and benevolent offices?

We might here insist on a variety of other particulars; but the instances already produced will, I hope, be sufficient to evince that prayer is highly beneficial, as it is fitted to carry on our advancement in the temper and practice of universal goodness. In the right discharge of this duty we establish and confirm all the habits of piety
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and virtue. By asking for the graces of the divine life, by declaring our desire and our purpose to cultivate them in our souls, we insensibly become better, and acquire an increasing preparation for the blessings of immortality. On this foundation, therefore, we may securely rest our answer to the sceptical question proposed in the text ; and on this foundation the difficulty will be fully removed. If our addresses and supplications do apparently tend to make us more devout, more holy, more just, and more compassionate, as is certainly the case, does it not necessarily follow, that they are profitable in the highest degree ? Yes, they are powerful means of cherishing those dispositions within us, which only can qualify us for substantial, unfading, and everlasting happiness.

But we may take notice, secondly, that prayer is extremely useful, as it is the source of much real consolation and pleasure. That which promotes the increase of devotion and righteousness in our minds, must proportionably promote our comfort ; because from devotion and righteousness spring the truest, the noblest joys to which we are entitled. From
devotion

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devotion and righteousness we obtain inward satisfaction, and are enabled to exult in the sense of the approbation and favour of our Maker. In this view, therefore, must not a regular intercourse with God, in the way of adoration and petition, have an agreeable influence on our internal peace?

But, besides this general effect, there will be found a genuine delight in the performance of the duty itself. Must not the consciousness of our being employed in that manner which is commanded by our great Creator, be very agreeable to our thoughts; and the reflection that we are holding communion with the grandest, the most amiable, the most pure, the most merciful of all Beings, be peculiarly reviving and transporting? Is there any earthly entertainment, any human gratification, that can compare with the honour and the felicity of conversing with the parent of perfection and excellence? Those know little of the true enjoyment of life, who separate from it an acquaintance with the blessed God, and that correspondence with him which is carried on by the sincere addresses of our hearts and our lips.

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There is, moreover, one virtue particularly connected with these addresses, which is of singular importance to our present comfort and welfare ; and that is, a cheerful trust in the providence and government of the eternal Jehovah. We cannot pray at all, in any rational signification of the word, without declaring our dependence on the Almighty for the benefits we expect, and our hope in his kindness. And the more we do pray to our heavenly Father, the more steadily, thankfully, and gladly shall we rely on his protection and benevolence. What, therefore, is calculated to increase our confidence in God, must have a favourable aspect on our sublimest happiness. That God is the manager of the universe, is the most important and delightful truth that exists ; a truth which lies at the foundation of religion ; a truth that is the fountain of our sweetest consolations. Hence we are assured that all things shall go well ; hence we are secure that our real bliss will be provided for, in every situation. Now, prayer doth not only lead us to reflect upon this truth, but is an actual exercise of
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our affections upon it. By prayer we at once declare, and promote, our reliance on infinite wisdom, and infinite mercy; and by so doing, we must, of necessity, promote our own abundant satisfaction.

We shall, in an especial manner, experience the relief that arises from it, in an hour of affliction. When we are surrounded with distresses, what should we do, if there were no God to whom we could apply; no God on whose compassion we could throw ourselves, and on whose power, wisdom, and kindness we could safely depend? What, in such a case, could we do indeed? Our condition would be deplorable and miserable beyond expression. But it is matter of ravishing pleasure that, in the midst of the deepest calamities flesh is heir to, we can look up to a Being who is gracious in his severest dispensations; that we can look up to a Being in whose benignity we may always trust. We can offer up our supplications to our heavenly Father; spread our griefs before him; and refer ourselves to his direction; humbly implore his protection, help, and the light of his countenance;

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nance; profess our acquiescence in his will; and beg that his trials may turn out to our present improvement, and our future glory. This we can do; and from such a conduct we shall derive more substantial support and comfort, than we possibly could by any other method. I might appeal to thousands, whether, in the day of adversity, they have not felt a reviving and divine consolation from a devout application to the throne of Heaven. Personal experience, and all the observations we are capable of making upon others, instruct us that it is, that it must be so; and, therefore, those who deny the profitableness of prayer, are to be pitied for their ignorance of its genuine worth and value. Once more,

The usefulness of prayer is apparent from its being appointed by God as a term, which, unless we comply with, we cannot alledge a just claim to his favour. When we consider the reasonableness of this duty, when we reflect how natural a testimony it is of our regard to the Supreme Mind, and how suitable to the relations in which we stand towards him, we may be led to conclude, that the

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the persons who neglect so proper a tribute to their Almighty Creator and Benefactor, cannot be agreeable in his sight; but that, on the contrary, their temper must disqualify them for his approbation. These sentiments are clearly confirmed by a vast multitude of passages in holy writ, where Jehovah is invariably represented as a Being who expects to be sought unto, with humble supplications; and where we are assured that none but such as do so are entitled to his affection. The Lord is nigh^u unto the soul that seeketh him; to those, and those alone, who call upon him in truth.

Independently, therefore, of the inward influence which prayer hath to rectify our dispositions, it is extremely serviceable, as it is the instituted method of our receiving benefits at the hands of our Maker. We cannot, indeed, move him by our importunities; we cannot change his nature and purposes; and he will always do what is right and fit, whether we ask it of him or not. But, then, it should be attended to, that if we do not think it worth our while to entreat him for the supplies we want, we
manifest

manifest ourselves to be undeserving of his goodness; and, in that case, it will be right and fit that he should refrain from bestowing upon us the gifts which we refused to implore from his bounty. It is undoubtedly wise and just in him to grant his favours only upon certain terms; and if we are so foolish and so wicked as to despise the conditions on which our welfare is offered, will not the loss of our happiness be entirely chargeable on our own stupidity and iniquity?

Hence we may perceive the reasonableness and advantage of praying, with due caution, for temporal, as well as for spiritual blessings: and hence we see the propriety of that connection, which is established in scripture, between our soliciting and receiving the assistances we stand in need of, in order to carry us forward in our religious course. "Ask," saith our Saviour, "and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you *." "Let us," saith the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, "come boldly unto the throne of grace,

* Matthew vii. 7.

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“ that we may obtain mercy, and find grace
“ to help in time of need *.” And in another place we are told that God confers his Holy Spirit on them that apply for it. Thus it is the appointment of our heavenly Father that the benefits he enriches us with should be communicated in this way ; and, therefore, prayer is highly and extensively useful, as it is the channel through which he conveys his kindn^{ess}es. It is the proper indication of that temper of mind, which renders us the objects of the Divine regard.

We have seen, then, that it is profitable in every view ; that it promotes internal piety and righteousness ; that it is the source of much comfort and satisfaction ; and that it is the established method of our obtaining the favour of the Deity. I hope, therefore, that a sufficient answer has been given to the enquiry in the text ; and that the objection of the sceptic and the infidel hath been proved to be wholly groundless.

And now, from what hath been said, it is evident, that those who so far forget the Almighty, as to restrain prayer before

* Hebrews iv. 16.

him,

him, are enemies to themselves. If our addresses and petitions to the throne of heaven are calculated, as we have shown, to increase our growth in piety, purity, and benevolence; to fill our hearts with sublime consolation; and, at the same time, are the appointed terms of receiving the blessings that are necessary for us; shall we not, by abstaining from them, do injury to our own souls? Yes, we shall be adversaries to our real felicity. We shall deprive ourselves of the noblest attainments, of the truest peace; and shall lose our title to the promises of divine favour, help, and mercy. Let us, therefore, lay these sentiments to heart; and, if we have any solicitude for our own temporal and eternal welfare, let us not neglect a constant application to the Supreme Being, by the warmest adorations, the sincerest praises, the humblest supplications, and the most generous intercessions. Farther,

We may perceive the wisdom and goodness of God in commanding us to maintain the regular discharge of this duty. That God hath expressly, strongly, and repeatedly in-

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fisted upon the performance of this duty, is plain from the whole tenor of revelation; and we might easily transcribe, in proof of our assertion, a great number of passages, both from the Old and New Testament. Is it not represented as what Jehovah absolutely requires and expects from us? And hath not our Saviour, in particular, commanded and enjoined it, in many places? Nay, hath he not condescended to instruct us in the practice of it, by leaving us a most admirable model whereon to form our addresses and petitions to our Maker?

Nor hath our blessed Lord been content with giving us his precepts and instructions, but hath mightily enforced them, by his own beautiful, engaging, and perfect example. Surely, if prayer was needless to any one, it must have been to him, who was spotless in his temper and conduct, and who knew that his heavenly Father was always pleased with him; and yet he persevered in the constant use of it. The cold mountains, and the air of midnight, were witnesses to the fervour of his devotion. His devotions were addressed in private and in public, and
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some charming instances and patterns of them are recorded, which we cannot sufficiently value.

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As the Supreme Being hath thus commanded us to pray without ceasing, was it not just and kind in him so to command us? He well knew the worth and excellence of prayer; he well knew that it would be highly advantageous to his creatures. Can we, therefore, avoid acknowledging his benevolence, in his insisting on a duty so essential to our best interests? And ought we not, on this account, to praise and magnify his glorious name? Again,

It behoves us carefully and habitually to perform our adorations and supplications to the throne of heaven. Some there are who fancy that they can keep up all the principles of virtue and goodness, without maintaining such an intercourse with their Maker. But, however persons may flatter themselves, and trust to their own strength and steadfastness, the abstaining from such an intercourse is an unhappy symptom of the decay of real piety. True religion is humble in its nature, and is willing to make use of

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those methods and helps, which God hath appointed, in order to carry it forward in the soul.

After having heard so much of the profitability of prayer, I would hope that you stand in need of no exhortations to the practice of it. I would hope that you will, thankfully and eagerly, fly to an exercise that will contribute so much to your welfare and comfort.

The advantages we have spoken of, alike extend to our secret addresses, our domestic devotions, and the public services of religion. Each of these things might justly be enlarged upon; but I shall only beg leave to add a word or two concerning family worship. That there is too general a neglect of it, cannot, I am afraid, be denied; and hath not the neglect of it been attended with consequences extremely fatal to the cause of genuine goodness? Is not the neglect of it one grand reason why the rising generation grow up with so imperfect a sense of religion upon their minds? And if the present fashion should prevail, so as to become universal, what can we expect but that the very face and idea of piety will be obliterated from
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the minds of our posterity? I am aware that well-disposed persons have been restrained from the performance of this duty by bashfulness, and a real, or fancied inability of expressing their thoughts with readiness and enlargement. But where any do not choose, or are not able, to exercise what is called free prayer, they ought to make use of proper forms; and this is what I would, in general, recommend. There are a number of excellent forms to be met with, in many pious writers; and several collections have, of late years, been published on purpose for families, which may be shortened or altered as circumstances require. Let me, therefore, beseech you, not to omit a practice that will be so serviceable to yourselves, your children, your relatives, and servants.

Finally, we shall never ask the question of the text, with a sceptical, or a profane disposition, if we are persuaded to keep up an habitual communion with our Maker, by praying unto him; but shall have the most delightful experience of its abundant profit. We shall daily advance in the attainments and virtues of the spiritual life. We shall feel increasing consolation, satisf-

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faction, and joy in our own breasts. We shall receive the support and aids of the Supreme Being, under all our difficulties and trials. We shall be entitled to sacred peace in the hour of death, and be prepared for that world of glory, where pure, unmixed devotion reigns and triumphs for ever and ever. Blessings these! of inestimable value! Blessings which we should seek after, with the utmost diligence and ardour, if we have any regard to our essential felicity. Let us, then, hold converse with our heavenly Father, in the way of humble and fervent adorations and petitions, that we may be happy in the present life, and happy in the mansions of endless and unfading dignity and perfection! Amen!

SERMON

S E R M O N V I I I .

The CHARACTER and HAPPINESS of
RELIGIOUS PERSONS.

MALACHI, III. 16, 17.

Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels,

HOWEVER uncommon it is for persons to stand up, with a noble fortitude, in the cause of religion, and to oppose the corruptions of a degenerate age; some of this character have actually existed in every period of the world. There have always

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ways been some who were superior to the allurements that were spread around them, and who could not be induced, even by the greatest terrors, to forsake the path of truth and righteousness. Such were Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and a variety of others, whose characters and conduct are recorded in the sacred writings of the Old Testament. Such, in a degree supremely excellent, and amiable, and perfect, was the blessed Jesus. Such were the apostles of our Lord. Such were the saints and the martyrs of succeeding times: and many there are, I doubt not, at this day, who are animated by the same principles; and who would, if called out to it, endure the same trials and sufferings, rather than forfeit their integrity.

Indeed, when we consider the glorious supports, and the divine promises, which are given to those who continue steadfast and unmoveable in the ways of goodness, it will be almost a matter of surprize, that the number of the persons who have adhered to piety, amidst surrounding opposition, hath not been, in fact, greater than we have reason

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nothing can equal, the encouragements that
are set before the upright in various passages
of holy writ.

Without having recourse to other scriptures, there is a strength of consolation in the text, sufficient, one should think, always to inspire us with an unshaken resolution in the service of our Maker. "Then they
" that feared the Lord, spake often one to
" another, and the Lord hearkened and
" heard it; and a book of remembrance
" was written before him, for them that
" feared the Lord, and that thought upon
" his name. And they shall be mine, saith
" the Lord of hosts, in that day when I
" make up my jewels."

These words have a peculiar reference to the temper and conduct of the virtuous few in an age of prevailing degeneracy and wickedness, and to the favour which God would shew to his servants, when his judgments were abroad against the transgressors. But they do, at the same time, express the behaviour of good men in every situation, and assert the regard which the Supreme
Being

Being will ever manifest towards the righteous. We shall, therefore, illustrate, in general,

First, The account which is given, by the prophet, of the character of religious persons. And,

Secondly, The gracious manner in which they will be treated by their heavenly Father. We are to illustrate,

First, The account which is given of the character of religious persons. And it is described by three phrases; "fearing the Lord," "thinking upon his name," and "speaking often one to another."

The religious character is described by the fear of the Lord. There is no expression of scripture which more frequently denotes the whole of our duty than this, and none that could do it more properly: for where a filial veneration for the Almighty resides in the breast, there will be the strongest incitement to abound in all the fruits of holiness. Then only will it be possible for us to act what is right, when our affections are thoroughly and deeply engaged in the cause of goodness. Now, among other passions, *that* of fear was inter-

woven

woven in the human constitution, by the Author of our natures, that it might impel us to avoid those objects which are productive of misery, and to pursue the things which terminate in happiness. With relation to eternal concerns, it urges us to flee, with the utmost solicitude, from the ruin that threatens the wicked, and to seek the immortal glory which awaits the righteous. It is not, however, a servile principle, which has its source in nothing but the dread of punishment. Were this the case, it could not be attended with that genuine regard to virtue which is essentially necessary to the religious character. The fear of the Lord, so often mentioned, and so strongly recommended, in the sacred writings, is a complex passion, which comprises a filial veneration, an inward esteem, and an ardent love for the Most High God. It views the Supreme Being in an amiable and pleasing, as well as an awful, light. It is founded on a deep sense of the divine existence and perfections in general, and has a particular respect to the universal knowledge and presence of the Almighty. It considers him as the great
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Searcher of hearts, from whom no action, no word, no sentiment can possibly be concealed. It contemplates him as the moral Governor of his creatures, who takes heed to their ways at present, and who will hereafter judge them according to their deserts. And it looks to him as the Benefactor of the universe, who is so gracious, so beneficent, in the whole of his conduct, that we ought, above all things, to be afraid of acting an ungrateful part to so kind a parent. Such a fear of the Lord as this, if it truly existed in our minds, would induce us to depart from evil, and render us solicitous to obey and to please our heavenly Father. We find, in common life, that the persons whom we are most anxious to oblige, and whose displeasure we most dread, are those for whom we have the highest reverence, esteem, and affection. Thus, also, will it be with respect to the blessed Jehovah. If we do, indeed, fear him, we shall make him the object of our supreme homage, shall worship him in the beauty of holiness, and endeavour to comply with all his commandments.

The religious character is farther described

as consisting in "thinking upon the name of the Lord." Thinking upon the name of God seems to be only another expression for fearing him, and is probably used with the very same signification. But if we should be disposed to consider it as having a different meaning, it may denote either the temper of mind which precedes, or the temper of mind which follows, a filial veneration for the Almighty. If we consider it as going before a filial veneration for the Almighty, it then implies that we should retain upon our souls a constant conviction of the divine nature, attributes, and government; a full persuasion that he is the inspector of our lives, and the judge of our actions; such a persuasion of these things as will render us afraid of transgressing his laws. But if we suppose that the phrase, "thinking upon the name of the Lord," is intended to express something that is subsequent to the religious fear before mentioned, it then signifies the actual regard which we pay to God, in consequence of the reverence we bear to his sacred majesty. It then signifies that we so retain him in our thoughts,

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so contemplate upon his august, and holy, and beneficent character, and set him before us in such an awful, striking, engaging, and habitual view, as to be influenced to the strictest piety and purity in all our behaviour.

Do we meet together in order to join in the solemn and public worship of our great Creator? We should reflect that his eye surveys us, and should endeavour to call up the most devout, and humble, and thankful affections towards him. Are we exposed to the attacks of temptation, and almost ready to submit to them? We should consider that our actions cannot be concealed from the all-searching knowledge of the Supreme Mind, and that he stands ready to assist and to reward us, if we steadily persevere in the path of our duty. Are we summoned to perform any offices of kindness to our fellow creatures? We should remember that the God of benevolence takes pleasure in the happiness we diffuse around us, and that he loves to see us like to himself in the most illustrious of his perfections. Are afflictions and sufferings our

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portion

portion below? We should endure them with patience, resignation, and fortitude, because we are in the presence of that Being who appoints us to trials for the exercise of our graces, who will relieve us under our calamities, and who intends our best advantage in the whole of his dispensations. In short, whatever we do, and wherever we go; in public and in private life; amidst all our enjoyments, and all our distresses, we should think upon the name of the Lord. Once more,

The religious character is described as including the "speaking often one to another." The words of the prophet, in the text, refer to a period in which a general corruption of manners prevailed, and piety was almost universally forsaken; and they declare that, at such a time, the righteous few, those who adhered to their Maker in sincerity, would endeavour to confirm and strengthen each other in their good principles and practices. For this purpose they would assemble together, and, by mutual discourse and fervent exhortations, maintain alive that flame of holiness which burned in
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their breasts. By such a conduct they would guard their souls against the temptations which surrounded them, and would become prepared to suffer every evil that could be inflicted upon them, rather than forfeit their integrity, and desert the cause of truth and God.

Such is the manner in which it is represented that upright persons will act, when they live in a degenerate age; and is it not extremely natural that they should do so? Is it not, likewise, extremely proper? "Ointment and perfume," saith Solomon, Prov. xxvii. 9. "rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel." The truly religious, by stirring one another up to a steady course of behaviour, reciprocally strengthen their faith, their courage, and their perseverance. The rust which might, otherwise, be apt to spread over their minds, is rubbed off; and they acquire a polish and a brightness which give them to shine with real beauty. Accordingly, if we look into the history of the church, we shall find that, in the days of persecution, the martyrs did sometimes ar-

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rive to an amazing degree of fortitude and joy, by the means of the free and heavenly conversation which passed between them. It is, also, taken notice of by Malachi, that they who feared the Lord, spake *often* one to another. They frequently talked together on the grand concerns of piety and virtue. They embraced every opportunity of mutually fortifying their minds in the cause of goodness.

Nor are we to imagine that this holy communication is only proper for the periods of public corruption, and public opposition to the interests of truth. Religious discourse is the duty and benefit of Christians in general. With respect to the manner of conducting it, a regard should undoubtedly be had to the temper of the age we live in, and different persons ought to be differently treated: but the righteous cannot, surely, totally refrain from a practice which is both edifying and delightful. In particular cases, a certain delicacy may be requisite. Whatever we would say to improve, or to awaken, men, must be incidentally brought in, and the way of introducing it should be

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scarcely perceptible. But be the method of doing it what it will, the thing itself, "the speaking often one to another," is incumbent upon us, and is greatly important to raise, to cherish, and to quicken our progress in the spiritual life. We are now to consider,

Secondly, the gracious manner in which persons of a religious character will be treated by their heavenly Father. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened, and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."

It is said, first, concerning those who spoke often one to another, that "the Lord hearkened, and heard it." Though this expression is only an accommodation to our imperfect way of speaking and thinking, yet it is very lively, beautiful, and affecting. It gives an engaging and a fine representation of the Supreme Being, as the moral governor

vernor of his creatures. It informs us, that the Deity is not an unconcerned spectator of human affairs, but that he constantly takes notice of them; that his eyes are ever abroad in the world, to mark the dispositions, the affections, and the actions, of the children of Adam. "He," as the Psalmist emphatically expresses it, "knows our downsit-
"ting and uprising; he understandeth our
"thoughts afar off. He compasses our
"path, and our lying down, and is ac-
"quainted with all our ways. For there
"is not a word in our tongue, but lo, he
"knoweth it altogether. He hath beset
"us behind and before, and laid his hand
"upon us. Whither shall we go from his
"spirit, or whither shall we flee from his
"presence *?"

The words "and the Lord hearkened,
"and heard it," besides their denoting that God inspects the conduct of his rational offspring, do farther imply that he is, in a particular manner, the patron and friend of the righteous. He is described as attending, with complacency, to the pious con-

* Psalm cxxxix. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7.

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versation which passed between his servants, when they strengthened each other in fortitude and virtue. Yes, the eternal Jehovah beholds, with approbation, their zeal for his honour. Is it not plain, from the fullest evidence, that this is the character of the Almighty? Is it not plain, from the displays of his wisdom, rectitude, and goodness, which are visible in the works of his creation, and the course of his providence? Is it not plain, from the rewards he hath conferred on virtue, and the punishment he hath inflicted on vice, in the present order of things? Is it not plain, from the moral faculties of the mind, and, especially, from that conscience which speaks so feelingly in the breast? And is it not incontestably plain, from numberless passages of holy writ, which tell us, with the utmost variety, elegance, and force of language, that Jehovah loveth such as are of a pure heart, that he approves their ways, and sees with pleasure their adherence to his cause? Hence it is said,

Secondly, that “a book of remembrance is written before him for them
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“that feared the Lord, and that thought
“upon his name.” This expression, of
God’s recording the characters and actions
of men in a book, which will hereafter be
produced, when they are called to judgment,
is not unfrequent in the scriptures; and is,
I suppose, an allusion to the public regis-
ters that were kept in the courts of princes,
or their capital cities. In these registers an
account was given of every remarkable event;
and the behaviour of particular persons was
taken notice of, if there was any circum-
stance in it interesting or important. In like
manner, the grand Sovereign of the universe
is represented as having before him a his-
tory of the thoughts, and words, and con-
duct of all his rational creatures, without
exception. “And I saw,” saith St. John,
Rev. xx. 12. “the dead, small and great,
“stand before God; and the books were
“opened; and another book was opened,
“which is that of life; and the dead were
“judged out of those things which were
“written in the books, according to their
“works.” As to the text, its meaning is
only this; that the Deity doth as certainly

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remember the virtues of his faithful servants, and will as certainly acknowledge and reward them, as if they had been actually set down in a volume for that purpose.

This remembrance of the Supreme Being extends to all the subjects of his moral government, whether good or bad. The wicked shall in vain hope to have their enormities concealed. All their secret abominations, all their fraudulent designs, all their open crimes, are recorded above, and shall be set in order before them, to their unspeakable confusion and horror. But the righteous shall be remembered in a manner which will be inexpressibly agreeable and delightful. They shall be remembered with applause by the great God himself, and by their blessed Saviour. They shall be remembered in a way that will conduce to their eternal honour, and their eternal felicity.

What a joyful time will it be to the genuine servants of the Most High, when they are summoned to appear before the divine tribunal! All ye to whom this

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character

character belongs, however poor, however mean, however afflicted, ye may, in fact, be in the present world, permit me to congratulate you on your happy condition. The day is approaching in which your gracious heavenly Father will render you glorious in the face of angels and men. At that day he will, before the most numerous and august assembly that imagination can conceive, call to mind the many prayers which, in the sincerity of your souls, you have poured out before him; the fervent devotion you have paid him in the places of public worship; and the zealous struggles you have maintained against temptation and vice. He will call to mind the integrity of your private life, your works of fidelity, and labours of love. He will call to mind your endeavours to promote the interests of religion, and your steady adherence to truth and virtue, however forsaken, despised, or persecuted. All these things shall be mentioned to your endless renown; and, for as much as ye were sincerely devoted to the gospel of Christ, and the practice of piety, your imperfections and your iniquities shall not be remembered

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remembered against you. The forgiving mercy of your heavenly Father shall consign them to oblivion. Through the rich goodness displayed by our Saviour in the gospel, you shall receive pardon, purity, and eternal happiness.

It is lastly asserted, in the text, concerning those who feared the Lord, and who thought upon his name, that they shall belong to God in that day when he makes up his jewels. Some commentators suppose that these words refer to a time of temporal tribulation, and that the destruction of Jerusalem is particularly intended. In this sense they will only imply, that the providence of Jehovah would be exerted, in an especial manner, to protect his own servants from the dreadful ruin which was to fall upon the unbelieving Jews, when their ancient city should be taken. The text, however, very naturally directs our thoughts to the final consummation of the world, as being eminently the day in which the Lord will make up his jewels. That is the day of separation and distinction; the day in which we shall discern between the
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righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not. In the present life, the good and the bad are promiscuously mingled together; so that it is not an unusual thing for the common pebbles, nay, for the dirt and rubbish of mankind, to be thrown in a heap with the richest pearls. But, in the grand decisive period, it will illustriously appear how dear the pious and virtuous are to their Maker. It will illustriously be seen that he esteems them as his peculiar treasure. When he collects his jewels from all the parts of the world, it shall be found that upright men are considered as among the most precious acquisitions of the Supreme Being. As such, they shall be taken into an intimate relation to him, shall be received into the celestial mansions, and enjoy his favour and affection for ever and ever. Thus shall it be done to them whom the King of heaven delighteth to honour. The Lord of Hosts hath declared, that this shall be the happy portion of those who fear him, and who think upon his name. And, now,

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The Character and Happiness

How much ought we to admire, and to adore, the divine condescension! Jehovah is exalted far above all blessing and praise. The songs which are uttered by the highest angels are infinitely beneath the dignity and extent of his perfections. The splendour of his throne, the grandeur of his might, the depth of his wisdom, the riches of his goodness, are subjects we should in vain pretend to conceive of in an adequate manner. The utmost flight our thoughts could be able to take, though we should bid them to range through the wide immensity of the creation, and attempt to ascend the peculiar residence of God, would be nothing, and less than nothing, when compared with his real majesty, and his boundless attributes. And yet this Being, whose power is so vast, whose knowledge is so unlimited, whose productions are so innumerable, whose glory is so transcendent; this all-perfect Deity, this King of Kings, this Lord of Lords, takes the most gracious notice of those who think upon his name! What words, then, can express the reverence, the admiration, the gratitude, the love, we should be inspired with,

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with, when we reflect upon him ! Can any of you truly say, O ! ye children of men, that this God is your God, your guide, and your patron ? Surely, you will ever contemplate upon him with the greatest fervour of devotion, and make him the constant object of your supreme regard.

Again, how happy is the condition of good men ! The Almighty, as we have seen, hath declared himself to be their un-failing friend. He hearkens to their pious language, and remembers their actions with pleasure and approbation. He will be their conductor through the various temptations and difficulties of life ; will support them, by the consolations of his Spirit, at the hour of death ; and will, at length, become their eternal reward. Is not, then, their situation unspeakably desirable and blessed ? In such a case, what can it greatly signify, though they are exposed to much affliction below ; though poverty, pain, and anguish happen to be their present portion ? What could it greatly signify, though the rage of the wicked should be armed against them, and they should be called even to suffer per-
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secution for the sake of righteousness? Still they are, and must be, truly happy. They enjoy the applause of their own minds; they are favoured with the comforts and assistances of their Maker, under every trouble; and shall soon be admitted to the realms of unmixed felicity.

Lastly, how solicitous should each of us be to fear the Lord, and to think upon his name! Are good men so highly regarded by God? Will none of their endeavours to please him be permitted to lose their reward? What, then, can furnish a stronger motive for our adherence to religion, in all situations? If we have any principles of ingenuity in our breasts, any sense of what is really amiable and excellent, we cannot withhold from the Supreme Being that regard which is so justly his due; nor shall we be seduced, either by example, or custom, or fashion, from making an open profession of piety. We ought to be allured by the kindness of our heavenly Father, by the love of the benevolent Redeemer, by the mercies of the gospel, by the whole of what hath been done for the salvation and happiness

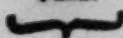
happinefs of the finful children of Adam, to consecrate ourselves to God.

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But, if these considerations have not their proper influence, let the transgressors reflect on the inevitable misery that attends a course of unrepented guilt. A book of remembrance is written for the wicked, as well as for the righteous; but the contents of it are dreadful, and shall be produced to the purposes of terrour, and not of joy. The finally impenitent, instead of being considered as the beloved property of the Most High, in that day when he makes up his jewels, shall be treated with infamy, as the disgrace and dirt of the creation, and be expunged from the roll of eternal life. If, therefore, we have any solicitude to avoid the greatest evil, and to secure the greatest bliss, let us set Jehovah always before us, as our Inspector, our Governor, our Judge; and let us act, in every relation and circumstance, from a regard to his sacred Majesty. Let us live in an habitual veneration for his perfections, and a steady obedience to his laws. And may these sentiments be so impressed upon our hearts, that we may be
numbered

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numbered among the real followers of goodness, at the solemn period in which a book of joyful remembrance shall be produced for them that feared the Lord, and who thought upon his name! Amen.

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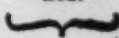
S E R M O N IX.

The PROGRESSIVE NATURE of GOOD-
NESS.

 PROVERBS iv. 18.

*But the path of the just is as the shining light,
that shineth more and more unto the perfect
day.*

IF we look around us, and observe the
course of the world, we shall find, in a
vast variety of respects, that things are not
brought at once to perfection, but that they
are gradually carried on to their full matu-
rity and splendour. Thus the flowers un-
fold themselves by degrees to the eye, and
pass through several successive stages of im-
provement, before they exhibit the com-
plete beauty of their colours, and the com-
plete fragrancy of their smells. Thus the
fruits of the earth are promised in their
buds and their blossoms, and appear for

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some time in an unripe state, before they can attain to the sweetness, the flavour, and the juices which render them an agreeable and an useful nourishment. So, likewise, with regard to the copious grain, which, at the proper season, delightfully and beneficently covers the surface of the ground, do we not see, according to the language of our Saviour, "first the blade, then the ear, " and after that the full corn in the ear*?"

A similar progress may be observed in the animals with which the globe abounds. There is not a single species of them but what rises by degrees to the due growth and vigour of its frame. And as to man in particular, we need not say how weak and feeble he is in his infancy, by what slow, and almost imperceptible, measures his corporal and mental powers expand, and how many years it is before he comes to the maturity either of his body or his mind.

This gradual advancement to perfection, which takes place in such a number of objects belonging to the natural world, takes

* Mark iv. 28.

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place, also, in most of the concerns of human life. We know that the arts and sciences have not been, cannot be, completed in an instant; that it hath often required ages to carry them to their proper pitch of excellence; and that individuals must mount step by step, in order to arrive at the summit of glory, in any mechanical employment, or any liberal profession.

Might it not, therefore, justly be expected, from analogy, that the same course of things should be established with respect to religion? This might, indeed, justly be expected; and that it is actually the case, we learn both from experience and from the positive declarations of scripture. At present, we shall go no farther than to the text, where the fact is set forth in a very clear and beautiful manner, "The path of the just," saith Solomon, "is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

These words obviously direct our thoughts to the character described in them, and to the nature of the good man's course in the divine life.

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With regard to the character in the text, it is *that* of the just. It is well known that the term, *just*, is used, in the sacred writings, with different degrees of latitude. Sometimes it is applied in a confined sense, as signifying no more than the equity we should maintain in our treatment of our fellow creatures, by rendering to all of them their proper dues. In this sense it occurs, 2 Sam. xxiii. 3. Prov. xviii. 17. Phil. iv. 8. Col. iv. 1. and Tit. i. 8; where it is said, that "he who ruleth over men must be just;" that "he who is first in his own cause seemeth just;" that we should follow "whatsoever things are just;" that masters should "give to their servants that which is just;" and that a bishop ought to be "just," as well as sober, holy, and temperate.

But the word is usually taken in a more extensive signification, as descriptive of a good man in general; as descriptive of one who acts well in all the relations and characters in which he is placed; who lives in the practice of piety, benevolence, self-government, and universal righteousness, as well as of justice strictly so called. In this larger

larger meaning the term is most commonly used, throughout the Psalms, the Proverbs, and the New Testament. Many passages might be produced in confirmation of this assertion, but I shall only refer you to the few instances which follow. Psalm vii. 9. "O! let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just." Proverbs iii. 33. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but he blesseth the habitation of the just." Luke xiv. 14. "And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee, for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Acts xxiv. 15. "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." 1 Pet. iii. 18. "For Christ, also, hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

It is in this extensive sense that the word must undoubtedly be taken in the text. The person whose path is there described, is a person who maintains an upright, holy, and virtuous part through the whole course and tenor of his life. He is a person who seriously considers, and steadily discharges,

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the general obligations of piety and goodness. This, no doubt, will necessarily include in it his being *just* in the strict and limited signification of the term. He will make a point of preserving an exact fidelity and equity in his intercourse with mankind. He will, according to the best of his abilities, render to his fellow-creatures their dues, and treat them in a manner agreeable to the various claims, of one kind or another, which they may have upon him. He will be true to his engagements, and faithful to his promises.

Besides this, he will perform the other offices and duties of the virtuous character. He will not only be honest and equitable, but kind and benevolent. Yes, he will endeavour to promote the welfare of those around him, and to behave, in every respect, as one who is animated with the principles of affection to his brethren of the human nature. It will be his labour, his delight, to render them happy, so far as the capacity of doing it, which Providence hath placed in his power, extends.

Nor, while he is just and generous to-
wards

wards men, is he unjust to, or forgetful of, the ever-blessed God. He seriously considers his obligations to the greatest and best of Beings, and is solicitous to testify his sense of them, by all the returns which he is capable of making. Hence he cultivates the deepest reverence for the sacred name of his Maker, and the warmest sentiments of devotion towards him. Hence he loves his high Creator and Benefactor above every object beside, is truly thankful for the mercies he receives from him, trusts in his protection and support, submits to his will, and is obedient to his commands. He sets Jehovah constantly before him, and ever acts with a view to the Divine approbation and favour.

Equally intent is the man whose character is drawn in the text upon maintaining and cherishing the personal virtues. He keeps himself in the exercise of self-government, temperance, moderation, meekness, humility, and contentment. In short, he endeavours to be found in all the statutes of the Lord, and to preserve all the graces of the spiritual life.

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But are we to imagine that the righteous are absolutely perfect? Happy, happy indeed would it be were that the case! but, alas! such an attainment is beyond the lot of humanity. The faithful followers of goodness are sincere in every part of their duty, and are desirous of complying with every dictate of holiness; but still, through the weakness of their nature, and the strength of temptation, they are subject to frailties, and sometimes guilty of considerable transgressions. In the strict sense, there is not a just man upon the earth, who liveth and sinneth not. How, then, does the truly upright person act, when he hath unhappily offended against the laws of his Maker? We may be sure that he will not persist in his iniquity, but that he will sincerely repent of what hath been amiss in his conduct, earnestly implore the divine forgiveness, and humbly, yet firmly, resolve that he will forsake his errors for the future. Most gratefully will he embrace the mercy, pardon, and assistance which are offered in the gospel of Christ; and to the gospel will he cordially apply, that he may be carried

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forwards in renewed purity and virtue. In consequence of the promises, consolations, and aids administered in the New Testament, he will gather fresh strength, rise above temptation, and advance daily in the things which are excellent and praiseworthy.

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This brings me to consider the nature of the good man's course in the spiritual life: And the nature of it is illustrated in the text by a very beautiful comparison. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." The obvious sentiment here held out is, that the religious person is progressive in his attainments; that he rises from small beginnings, and tends upwards, till he arrives to the highest state of excellence and splendour. Let us consider,

First, The comparison of Solomon, as representing the character of the upright at, and a little after, their entrance upon the ways of holiness. During the darkness of the night, the face of things is involved in obscurity and confusion; and continues, for a while,

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a while, disagreeable, dangerous, and dreadful. But, at length, a streak of light dawns in the east, which, gradually increasing, unfolds still more and more the beauties of the creation. In time, the sun begins to appear, exhibits part, and then the whole of its resplendent orb, mounts by degrees in the heavens, and, as it advances in its career, throws fresh glory on the objects of nature.

Is it not thus in the openings of the divine life? Perhaps it has been the unhappiness of the man who may now be deservedly numbered among the just, that he was formerly in subjection to ignorance and vice. He was a slave to evil habits and affections, and stood obnoxious to a sentence of condemnation. But at last, through the blessing of the Almighty, on the instructions of sacred wisdom, religion dawns upon his soul. He is convinced of the error and the danger of his ways. He sees things, in some measure, in their genuine colours, and begins to go on in the true path. His course will not, however, at first, be so bright and so pure as it ought to be, and as it will here-

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after be. The work of piety and virtue, even when the beginning of it may be distinctly marked, is not carried instantaneously to perfection. When a person has really devoted himself to the cultivation of religious truth, and the practice of righteousness, he may have many difficulties to struggle with, which cannot be conquered without much pains, and which can only be surmounted by slow steps. He is enlightened indeed, but the light is faint and feeble. There is, no doubt, a very considerable difference in this respect; and some will make an abundantly quicker progress in the divine life than others do. Some shall have such powerful convictions, and such enlarged views, with regard to moral and eternal concerns, as to have a speedy change produced in their temper and conduct; while others are far longer in getting the better of their evil habits. Thus the sun shall at one time arise in all the splendour he is capable of, without being shorn of his beams by mists and clouds; while at another time the mists and clouds shall hang so pertinaciously in the air, that it will not be in his power

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power to disperse them till late in the morning.

There are, likewise, persons who cannot exactly trace the beginnings of virtue in their minds. Such is the case of those who have been brought up early in the ways of goodness, and who, by the blessing of God on their pious education, have never sensibly deviated from the right course. Still, however, with regard to these persons, must not their improvement in piety be necessarily a gradual thing? Their first existence was little more than an animal existence, and the dawnings of reason and virtue in them will be slow, gentle, and successive. Though they cannot precisely specify the openings of religion in their souls, the principles of it must, notwithstanding, be, for a while, comparatively weak, and must increase by small degrees. But,

Secondly, we may consider the comparison of the text as representing the path of the just in its beautiful and agreeable progress, after the first difficulties have been, in a great measure, conquered. When the sun hath gotten above the horizon, and

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hath dissipated the fogs that interrupted or obscured its appearance, it advances in the heavens with augmenting lustre and majesty. Its light grows every minute more strong and more vivid, and its influence is still greater and greater in cheering, adorning, and fructifying the earth. So the good man, having acquired right principles and dispositions, and having obtained, in a certain degree, the dominion over his wrong affections, will be daily advancing in the virtuous life. His knowledge of divine objects will continually become more clear, just, and extensive. His piety will mount on sublimer wings, and rise to a nobler elevation. His obedience to the will of his Maker will be increasing in sincerity, activity, and fruitfulness. His resignation to the dispensations of Providence will grow more calm, steady, and joyful. His benevolence to his fellow creatures will perpetually improve in its fervour, enlargement, and utility. His self-government will advance in regularity, uniformity, and vigour; his moderation be still better known unto all men; his patience carry on its work towards completion; his meekness

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meekness assume new graces; and his fortitude be displayed with quickened strength and firmness. Thus, likewise, will he proceed with regard to all the parts and offices of the religious character. He will not imagine that he hath already attained, or that he is already perfect, but will be pressing onwards to the summit of excellence. His course will have a beautiful progression, and will be advancing, by suitable degrees, to the utmost pitch of rectitude, glory, and blessedness.

Can we, however, have the pleasure of asserting that the just man shall never be interrupted in his spiritual career? That, alas! is a pleasure which we must not claim. We often see that the sun, when it is mounting its illustrious path, is intercepted from our eyes by passing clouds, which, for a little time, shade and diminish its resplendent beams; but it soon emerges from the obscurity that involved it, and breaks out with fresh splendour. So the righteous may fall into errors; but if they do fall into errors, they will not continue in them. By the divine assistance, they will recover themselves

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themselves again, and run in the way of goodness with enlargedness of heart, and with accelerated speed. SERM.
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Thus will they tend to the last point represented in the comparison of the text, which is the completion of the just man's course, in the attainment of full perfection and felicity. We know that the sun ascends in his career, till he comes to his meridian splendour, and then he appears in the height of his majesty and glory. So, likewise, the path of the upright leads on to the sublimity of moral, of religious worth and excellence. The faithful follower of that which is good, will not be satisfied till he has laid aside every weight, and every sin, that may be apt to encompass him, and hath entirely finished the race that is set before him. Having perpetually advanced in piety and universal virtue, he shall, at length, arrive to an establishment in them, which is free from the mixture of weakness and alloy.

Can this great and noble work, however, be thoroughly compleated within the narrow limits of the present state? No, it is too mighty, too arduous to be entirely accomplished,

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plished, till the just man shall become an inhabitant of the heavenly world. Then shall the divine image be fully formed in his soul, and he shall become consummately amiable and excellent. Being thus perfect in purity, he shall be perfect in felicity. His happiness shall keep pace with his holiness; and both his holiness and his happiness shall be absolutely uninterrupted, and absolutely secure. They shall admit of no diminution, no shades, and be liable to no change but what arises from their continual increase; a change this, which is infinitely desirable and delightful.

Here we are presented with an illustrious, a charming circumstance, wherein the comparison of the text will not be found to hold good. When the sun hath arisen to its noon-day splendour, it doth not continue in that splendour, but gradually declines. It loses its strength and heat, till, at length, it sinks below the horizon. The light wears off by degrees, the twilight succeeds, and darkness again takes its turn to reign over the face of nature. Not so is the case of the just man, when he is arrived to the completion of his course, and fixed in the celestial

celestial mansions. When he is there established, his sun of excellence and glory shall never go down. His purity and felicity shall not be diminished by a length of ages; but shall shine with unabated, with eternal lustre. O! resplendent, O! admirable, O! divine happiness of the truly good! a happiness to which no comparisons are equal, which beggars all description, and which exceeds the brightest conceptions the brightest imaginations can form!

And now, from what has been said, we may perceive,

The real worth of the religious character, and its infinite superiority to *that* of the wicked. How valuable the religious character is, cannot but appear from all that has at present been offered. The just man is possessed of the virtues which have a genuine dignity and splendour, and which render the partakers of them the deserved objects of high approbation and esteem. These virtues, too, are continually increasing; so that he is growing every day more like to the purest and most exalted intellectual beings, and, especially, more like to

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the God and Father of perfection and blessedness. His felicity, also, shall keep pace with his attainments, and shall be gradually rising to its supreme consummation. Do we not here, then, behold true excellence? Do we not here behold an excellence which cannot be found in any object that is unconnected with piety and goodness? Is not here an excellence, compared with which beauty, power, riches, external grandeur, and all that commonly seems glorious and desirable in the eyes of men, are less than nothing, and vanity?

The value of the religious character will be still more apparent, if we contrast it with the opposite disposition and behaviour. "The way of the wicked," saith Solomon, in the verse following the text, "is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble." And, in some preceding verses of the chapter, with what earnestness and affection doth he caution us against treading in the steps of the transgressors! "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."

"away." Well might the wise author express himself in this emphatical variety of language! for the state of obstinate sinners is, in every view of it, dangerous and dreadful. Are they not wretched in the temper of their minds, wretched in their own thoughts and reflections, and wretched in their future expectations and prospects? Those, therefore, who chuse a course of iniquity, deprive themselves of the sublimest enjoyments, lose the graces and virtues which are admirable and divine, and pursue the road that leads to condemnation. What folly is equal to *their* folly? How base and hateful is their character? how deplorable their situation?

Farther, what hath been said, affords a standard by which to examine our religious condition. True goodness is, as we have seen, a progressive thing. If, therefore, we have the genuine principles of it in our hearts, they will not be inactive; but will operate, with increasing strength, in our lives and conversations. By this test, then, let us enquire into the state of our souls. Do we go backward, or do we go forward, in the path of holiness? This is a question of the

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utmost importance. If we go forward in the path of holiness, the sweetest satisfactions, the purest, the noblest joys, are our portion. But if we go backward, let us tremble at the precipice we are approaching, let us narrowly inspect our situation, let us take heed to our steps, and walk, for the future, with a greater caution, vigilance, and firmness. Sometimes we behold a bright morning obscured by clouds, that grow thicker and thicker, till they end in storms and tempests, which entirely deface the beauty and glory of the day. O! how solicitous should we be that this doth not become *our* case! Let not *our* fun of piety be intercepted in its illustrious career! If we have reason to apprehend that we are declining in the divine life, let us be humbled for our past defects, let us apply to the mercy of the gospel for pardon and assistance, let us strengthen the things which are ready to die, and endeavour, for the time to come, to be always abounding in the work of the Lord.

The exercise of the utmost attention and vigilance, against going backward in the course of goodness, is the more necessary, on
account

account of the character of the age in which we live. We need not be told that the spirit of the times, however excellent in many respects, is unfavourable to the strictness of religious principles and practice. A dissipation so general hath gone abroad, that it has had an unhappy influence on the minds and manners of great numbers, who once appeared remarkably earnest and serious in cultivating a devout temper, and in prosecuting the concerns of their immortal salvation. Let the melancholy instances of those who have departed from their first love, induce others to be constantly upon their guard; lest *they*, also, should be drawn aside by the deceitfulness of vice, the seductions of evil example, and the fashionable allurements of the world.

Lastly, let us be studious to have *our* path the path of the just, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. This we should be engaged to, if we have any regard to our real interest and welfare; for the greater progress we make in what is excellent and praiseworthy, the higher will be our dignity and felicity. If we are

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happily numbered among the righteous, let us labour to be daily advancing in the graces and virtues of the religious character. The exhortations to this purpose are often repeated in scripture, and the motives and rewards by which they are enforced are as affecting, as cogent, as glorious as can possibly be imagined. It is to be hoped, therefore, that such frequent exhortations, recommended by such mighty motives and rewards, will not be lost upon us. O! may we be animated with the noble ambition of rendering our course of holiness as illustrious as possible, by a continued progress in every virtuous and divine attainment! To this end, it is of infinite importance that we be devoted to the service of our Maker in early life; for it is chiefly by remembering him in the days of our youth, that we can expect to make large advances in knowledge, piety, usefulness, and happiness.

With regard to those who have not yet entered upon the way of goodness, how solicitous, how anxious should they be to engage in it instantly! This is a matter of
inexpressible

inexpressible moment and seriousness, and a delay in it is unspeakably dangerous. The natural sun, though it goes down in the evening, and gives place to darkness, shall, notwithstanding, rise again in the morning. It shall awake with new lustre, and burn with new splendour. But the season of religion, if once lost, will never more return. Doth it not behove us, therefore, to seize, with ardour, the golden opportunity? Doth it not behove us immediately to turn our steps to the path of truth and holiness? God grant that we may do it with such diligence, activity, and success, as, at length, to be admitted into the heavenly world, and to shine there for ever, in the kingdom of our eternal Father! Amen.

S E R M O N X.

The CHARACTER and BLESSEDNESS of
the MEEK.

MATTHEW V. 5.

*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit
the earth.*

IF we consider the general nature and design of the gospel, we shall find that its instructions, its principles, and its motives, are almost entirely directed to another world. The Jewish institution was enforced by temporal sanctions; but the grand objects to which the revelation of Jesus points our regard, the grand objects it proposes as the scope to which our virtues tend, and as the final recompence of our graces, are the joys and glories of immortality. Should, therefore, but little present happiness arise from the pursuit of holiness, there would be no reason for us to complain; nor should we want

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want sufficient inducements to the practice of it; since an eternal life of perfection and felicity is infinitely more than a counterbalance to all the difficulties, and sorrows, and sufferings, we could possibly meet with below.

However, while the New Testament chiefly insists on those arguments for goodness which are drawn from the prospect of a future state, it leaves others in their full force. It does not detract from, or prevent, any of the agreeable and useful natural effects which result from walking in the ways of righteousness; for they may each of them take place in an entire consistency with the doctrines and views of the evangelical writings. Nay, our sacred religion hath condescended, in two or three instances, to recommend its precepts, in a very particular manner, by temporal considerations. Thus St. Paul hath informed us, 1 Timothy iv. 8. that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Thus, likewise, our divine Master himself hath said, "Blessed are the

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" meek;

“ meek ; for they shall inherit the earth.”

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It may seem remarkable that our Lord should mix a sentiment of this kind with motives so extremely different; for the other rewards, mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, are entirely of a spiritual nature. But if we examine the matter with attention, we shall perceive a peculiar propriety in our Saviour's pitching upon the blessing described in the text. We may observe, throughout the whole of the beatitudes, a suitableness between the virtue specified and the recompence it shall receive. Now, meekness is so naturally and necessarily attended with a happy influence on our present tranquillity and welfare, that the connection between them was of all others the most proper to be mentioned.

According to the method which naturally offers itself, I shall endeavour to illustrate the character held forth in the text; and the felicity to which persons of such a character are entitled.

I am to illustrate, first, the character held forth in the text. To be meek is to possess that quietness and gentleness of temper

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per which bears afflictions without repining; which is not easily provoked to resentment and revenge; which is always inclined to act the mild and friendly part; and which is not apt to be ruffled by the little disagreeable accidents to which mortality is continually subject. This disposition does not, however, suppose that we are insensible to the evils of life, or to the injuries we meet with from our fellow-creatures. That a stoical apathy is not expected from us, is plain from the constitution of the mental frame: for we are so created as to feel, and sometimes strongly feel, the distresses that come upon us; and did we not do it, we should be monsters rather than men; nor could there be the least virtue in our submission to the divine will. We are, likewise, formed in such a manner, that, upon the apprehension of any hurt's being voluntarily designed us, or upon the experience of its being actually done us, our anger unavoidably rises in the breast; and this is not a fault, when our wrath is only proportioned to the cause of offence, and is not indulged to an undue length of time. As we

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are thus constituted, it is hence evident, that when calamities fall upon us, we must allow some scope to the emotions of grief; and that, when we have been ill used, it is right to manifest that we are not unconscious of the provocation.

But, though all this is strictly true, and it deserves to be attended to, yet it is not here that the danger of running into an error usually lies. In general, there is little reason to fear lest we should not sufficiently lament over our afflictions, and lest we should be too patient with those who have offended us. The greatest hazard is on the other side; and, therefore, it is the prime business of religion to regulate our passions, and to reduce them within their proper limits. Its aim is to discourage the violent sallies of complaint and resentment, and to cherish the softer virtues and graces of the soul.

Among these graces, meekness bears a distinguished rank, and is a noble ornament to our nature, whether we consider it as exercised with respect to God, our fellow-creatures, or ourselves. That it may be exercised

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exercised with respect to God, cannot be doubted; for the quietness and gentleness essential to its nature are very proper dispositions towards our Creator, when he is pleased to visit us with afflictive dispensations. As he is the sovereign Disposer of events, as he knows what is best for us, and always does nothing but what is perfectly just and gracious, we should submit, without murmuring, to the appointments of his will. Some there are who are extremely fretful, impatient, and turbulent, when they meet with difficulties and distresses. When they are chastised, they are, according to the language of the prophet Jeremiah, "like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." They struggle with great fury, and will not readily yield to the governing hand of the Supreme Being. Not so the men who are truly meek. Sensible that the burden which the almighty Ruler sees fit to lay upon them must be borne, and that it is intended for their real, their lasting benefit, they receive it without complaining. Exceedingly beautiful is the language of David, in this view, Psalm cxxxi. 2.

"Surely

“ Surely I have behaved and quieted myself
“ as a child that is weaned of his mother :
“ my soul is even as a weaned child.”

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But, as these thoughts come under the general head of affliction, and there is frequent occasion to insist upon them, I shall proceed to the consideration of meekness as it regards our fellow-creatures. And here the objects on which it is much exercised are the little provocations that are given us by those with whom we are connected. Such is the state of human life, that the persons around us will be often doing things which displease us. Now, how are we to act in these cases? Are we to be always in a flame, and always manifesting our anger and resentment? This many are apt to do; the consequence of which is that they are the slaves of perpetual passion. But the meek man performs a wiser and a nobler part. He bears the failings of his fellow-mortals with patience; he allows for their infirmities; he believes that their errors, in a variety of instances, proceed more from weakness than design; and he reflects that his own happiness would constantly

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stantly be disturbed, were he thus to put it in the power of others. Very prudently, therefore, he keeps the possession of himself, and receives trivial neglects and affronts with calmness, silence, and candour.

Nor is it only in the manner of our submitting to smaller offences that meekness appears, but, likewise, in the manner with which we treat more atrocious crimes. It is, indeed, true, that when we have been wilfully and greatly injured, we should testify our indignation; and it may even be incumbent upon us to punish the transgressors with considerable severity. But still there will be room left for the practice of much mildness and gentleness. When we have been most offended, we should take care that we do not lose the command of ourselves. We should guard against being betrayed into the same conduct with those whom we condemn, and endeavour to maintain a composure of soul. This is agreeable to the advice which St. Paul gives to servants, Titus ii. 9, "not to answer again." And, what is still more deserving of our regard, this is agreeable to the spotless and engaging

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example of our blessed Saviour, who, as we are informed, 1 Peter, ii. 23, "When he " was reviled, reviled not again; when he " suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth " righteously." We read, also, that Michael the archangel durst not bring a railing accusation against Satan (or the adversary with whom he contended), but only said, " The Lord rebuke thee !" Jude 9.

Moreover, the temper mentioned in the text, without having any reference to provocations and injuries, includes in it that sweetness and kindness which we should exercise in the whole of our deportment to our fellow creatures. It implies a certain softness and civility of mind, which inclines us to be gentle and obliging to all around us. It supposes an evenness and placidness of disposition, which, while it renders us patient and candid to the offences of others, prevents us from affording them any cause of complaint, and from every degree of a rude or turbulent behaviour. In this sense it partakes something of humility, and something of general humanity and benevolence.

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Thus our divine Master, speaking of himself, Matthew xi. 29, saith, "I am meek and lowly in heart;" signifying the condescension he practised in teaching his holy religion, and the beneficent readiness he shewed to instruct all who came to him for knowledge, comfort, and salvation.

Once more, meekness may be considered with respect to ourselves; in which view I understand by it that calmness and self-government which do not permit our inward peace to be broken in upon by the little accidents that are daily occurring. There are a multitude of external circumstances, of too insignificant a nature to be entitled calamities or afflictions, which may not fall out exactly according to our wishes. Now, if men have not acquired the mastery over their temper, even the most contemptible incidents may interrupt or destroy their felicity. Hence we see numbers of persons who are uneasy and fretful on every trifling concern. They are uneasy and fretful at concerns so trifling that the mention of them would disgrace the dignity of the pulpit.

Exceedingly

Exceedingly different is the conduct of such as are truly meek. Having learned to regulate their passions, and to possess their souls in quietness, we do not behold them murmuring, or raging, because they cannot bend all the events of life to their own will. They submit with cheerfulness, to the order of nature; and look with a calm indifference on the things which it is not in their power to change or amend. It was in the exercise of the general disposition recommended in the text, that Moses obtained a most honourable testimony. So remarkable was he for the mildness and equanimity of his mind, that, though he met with a prodigious variety of trials and provocations, there appears only one instance in which he deviated from the usual tranquillity and gentleness of his deportment.

I now proceed, secondly, to illustrate the felicity to which the character of meekness is entitled. “Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.” It can scarcely be imagined that the assertion of our Lord, in this place, is to be taken in a sense which is strictly literal. It is not, it

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cannot be, his meaning, that the meek shall always have larger terrestrial possessions than others, but that they shall enjoy, upon the whole, a greater portion of present happiness than such as are of a contrary temper. Let their outward circumstances be what they will, they shall receive a much truer pleasure, from the gifts of Providence that are bestowed upon them, than those who are favoured with the highest degrees of wealth and affluence, and yet are fretful, passionate, and boisterous in their dispositions.

There may, however, many cases occur in which the virtue mentioned in the text shall assist the external prosperity of the persons who are endued with it. The man of meekness will not be disturbed by the little rubs that lie in the way of his temporal pursuits, but will go on with a patience and perseverance that may be a mighty help to him in his affairs. He will also the more easily obtain the end he has in view, as he will encounter less opposition than turbulent and contentious spirits must expect to find. The excellence of his
character

character will often procure him friends, who will be ready to encourage him in his profession or employment, and to assist him in his undertakings. Hence he may literally inherit the earth; may make advances in worldly wealth which he would not otherwise have done.

The happy temper he is possessed of, may, likewise, contribute to prolong his days. It is well known that violent passions are hurtful to the body, as well as to the soul. They have a tendency to waste and destroy the finer parts; and, consequently, may be the means of bringing our terrestrial fabric to a speedier dissolution. Whereas a calmness and gentleness of mind will be extremely favourable to health; agreeably to the observation of the wise Solomon, who informs us, Proverbs xvii. 22, that "a chearful heart doeth good like a medicine; " but that a broken spirit drieth the bones." A serene and placid frame of soul keeps the vital powers in their proper order; and has often been recommended by physicians as of singular importance to those who wish to exist for many future years.

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But, whatever may be the case in this respect, one thing we are sure of, which is, that the meek, while they do continue below, will have the best and truest enjoyment of life. The events by which numbers are so discomposed and harassed, as to lose the very relish of their being, will have little or no influence upon the tranquillity and satisfaction of the men who deserve the appellation of the text.

As to the persons of a different disposition, what can be more wretched or deplorable than their situation? Their afflictions are doubled by their perverse murmurings, and rebellious complaints against their Maker. The provocations and injuries they meet with are rendered tenfold more poignant by the peevishness, resentment, and rancour which arise in their own breasts. The violence of their behaviour alienates from them the affection of their fellow-creatures; and their uneasiness at every cross accident corrodes the various blessings which are diffused around them. Can such men be said to inherit the earth? No, the earth is to them a dreary scene, a dismal desert; and

and what heightens the misery of the case is, that it is not made so by the will of Providence, but by their own folly, obstinacy, and iniquity, which have turned a pleasant land into a wilderness, and an agreeable habitation into an abode of anxiety, pain, and wretchedness.

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How delightfully different is the condition of the persons who are endued with the spirit of meekness ! The deepest distresses they are exposed to are wonderfully alleviated by the submission, the patience, the resignation with which they bear them. As to the slight misdemeanours and offences committed against them, they regard them not ; and even more aggravated injuries do not blow them up to a violent flame of indignation, or induce upon them the habits of malice and revenge. When they have the greatest occasion for complaint, they resent with moderation and punish with temper. The sweetness, the civility, the obligingness of their manners, procure the love and good offices of their relations, their neighbours, their acquaintance ; and, with respect to the little disagreeable incidents

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which are inseparable from humanity, they esteem them as objects too insignificant to disturb the quiet of their minds. Such being their dispositions, and such their behaviour, need we ask whether the meek inherit the earth? Yes, they inherit the earth in the noblest sense of the word, and "shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." While their adversity is lessened, their prosperity is mightily heightened by the excellent virtue that reigns in their breasts; and, at the same time, it is a source of the noblest inward pleasure. They have a sublime serenity and gladness in contemplating the frame of their own spirits; and this serenity and gladness they would not exchange for all the honours and possessions of the world.

Thus we see how true the connection is between the character and blessedness of the text. But, though our present business is, principally, with the motive particularly specified by our Saviour, it cannot be amiss to remember that meekness is recommended also by other considerations, and those too of a very important and illustrious nature.

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By the exercise of it, we render the situation of those who depend upon us, and are connected with us, vastly more pleasing; and contribute to the peace and harmony of the general system. In short, we become the instruments of beautifying the earth, and of making its inhabitants easy and happy.

Nor does the amiable virtue we are treating of extend its influence to this life only, but to the eternal state. It is, indeed, a momentous Christian grace, a grace essentially necessary to the manifestation of our being the genuine disciples of Jesus, and which is admirably calculated to fit us for the divine approbation. Extremely high are the terms of applause in which it is spoken of, and extremely valuable the benefits annexed to it, in the scriptures both of the Old and the New Testament. Psalm xxii. 26, we read, "that the meek shall eat and be satisfied;" Psalm xxv. 9, "that God shall guide them in judgment, and teach them his way." In the xxxviith Psalm, verse 11, we have the same promise that we find in the text; and in the cxlviith Psalm, and the 6th verse, and the cxlixth, and

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and the 4th verse, we are told "that the
 " Lord lifteth them up," and that "he
 " will beautify them with salvation." Isaiah
 informs us, chapter xxix. 19, that "they
 " shall increase their joy in Jehovah;" and
 in the lxixth chapter, at the beginning, he
 prophetically describes it as a distinguishing
 part of the Messiah's office to "preach the
 " gospel to the meek." In how high esti-
 mation the men of this temper were held by
 our blessed Saviour, is abundantly evident
 from the beatitude upon which we are now
 discoursing; and is exhibited in a most
 striking light by his being himself a spot-
 less and complete pattern of the same tem-
 per. If we go forward in the sacred wri-
 tings, we shall perceive that meekness is
 numbered among the fruits of the Spirit by
 St. Paul *; and St. Peter will instruct us,
 that to "have the ornament of a meek
 " and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of
 " great price †." Excellent and happy
 disposition indeed! which is thus recom-
 mended by the precept and example of our
 divine master, and which is so agreeable in
 the eyes of the grand Parent of mercies!

* Galatians v. 23.

† 1 Peter iii. 4.

What

What crowns the whole is, that the possession of it will have a mighty aptitude to prepare us for the mansions of the celestial state; those delightful and endless abodes where nothing can be admitted but what is serene and gentle, peaceful, pleasant, and kind.

And now, from what has been said, we see what the impatient, the fretful, the turbulent, and the resentful lose, by being the slaves of their evil passions. They lose not only the valuable, the numerous temporal blessings we have already described, but blessings of a still nobler and more durable nature. They lose what is the highest perfection and dignity of a rational mind, the command of themselves, the government of their own desires and affections. They lose their usefulness in the world. They lose *that* which is powerfully recommended by the precepts and example of their great Master, and highly acceptable to their heavenly Father; *that* which would eminently fit them for the realms of immortal glory. And what is it that they gain? Why they gain, (dreadful acquisition!) they gain
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gain a temper which corrodes every enjoyment; which renders them hateful to their fellow creatures, to their Saviour, and their Maker; which assimilates them to infernal spirits, and qualifies them for the habitations of darkness and misery.

Can we, then, want inducements to the cultivation of meekness? No, inducements stand thick around us; they call upon us from every side; and invite us to attend to their persuasive voice. Let us, therefore, be prevailed upon to cherish this charming disposition, and to abound in it more and more.

But it may be asked, How is this to be done? If we have hitherto been strangers to it, how are we to attain it? It must be acknowledged, that if we have not yet applied to the regulation of our passions, if we have not yet learned any thing of the virtue recommended in the text, it is a difficult task which we have in view. It is a task, however, which we are bound to undertake, by the strongest possible motives; a task which we must undertake, or be undone; and let us not despair of accomplishing it;
for

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for God will be ready to assist our sincere and strenuous endeavours. Let us diligently apply to all the methods which will have a tendency to raise in us a meek and quiet spirit. Let us consider that the afflictions we endure spring from the wisdom and goodness of the blessed Deity; and that we cannot alter or amend the little disagreeable accidents of life by our impatience. Let us allow for the infirmities of such as have offended us, and represent their conduct in the most favourable light. Let us watch the first risings of anger in our breasts, and carefully guard against their proceeding to a criminal excess. Let us maintain constant supplications to the Almighty, that he would enable us, by his sacred influence, to subdue our tumultuous passions, and to possess our souls in resignation and tranquillity, in gentleness and forbearance, in clemency and love: and let us set continually before us the several mighty considerations, whether of a temporal or a spiritual kind, which are calculated to excite within us the grace of meekness, and which represent the sublime felicity to which it is entitled. All this

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should be done by us, and it is so reasonable, that I can scarcely persuade myself that it is necessary to exhort you to the practice of what is thus evidently conducive to your real interest, satisfaction, and blessedness, both present and future.

Let me, however, particularly put young persons in mind, that it will be of the highest importance to them to attend to the sentiments which have been offered. It is always with peculiar concern that I see those who are setting out in life discover the symptoms of an unruly, angry, and resentful disposition. With grief I behold the misery they are laying up for themselves and for others, unless they diligently guard against the danger to which they are exposed. I would, therefore, beseech such as are in the days of their youth, to apply to the early management of their tempers : and let them be assured, that from so doing they will derive the most delightful effects. Let them listen to the voice of the experienced, who will tell them that meekness is an excellent and divine attainment ; that peace and pleasure are in its train ; that all its consequences are charming,

charming, both here and hereafter; and that they would not lose the possession of it for a thousand worlds. Be persuaded, then, my friends, to make the trial for yourselves, and I pronounce that the result will be infinitely desirable and happy. An agreeable lustre and joy will be thrown around your present existence, and you will be training up for the realms of unmixed and unceasing tranquillity and gladness. Amen.

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S E R M O N XI.

MUTUAL AGREEMENT in the JOURNEY
of LIFE recommended.

GENESIS xlv. 24. Latter Part.

See that ye fall not out by the way.

ON the very first mention of these words, you will be sensible that they must have proceeded from the lips of a wife and a good man. You will perceive that they were delivered by a person who was concerned for the welfare of those to whom he spoke; and who knew that nothing could be more prejudicial to their interests than discord, nothing more salutary to them than an harmonious agreement. Nor will you be deceived in your conjecture; for the text contains the language of one of the greatest and most amiable characters that are recorded in the history of the Old Testament. It is the lan-

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guage of Joseph, whose wisdom had raised him to the highest rank in the court of Egypt, and whose excellent virtues are displayed in many striking instances. We need not be told, that his story, as related by Moses, is peculiarly beautiful and affecting; beautiful and affecting to a degree that is not easy to be paralleled in any writer, whether ancient or modern. At the time when the words we have now read were uttered, he had made himself known to his brethren, had provided accommodations for their journey back into the land of Canaan, and had determined to send for his father, and his father's house. And when he took his leave of his brethren, he gave them this useful advice, "See that ye fall not out by the way." You will easily suppose that it is not my intention to consider the text in the particular view with which it was originally spoken, but to apply it in a general manner; in doing which, I shall endeavour to raise and illustrate some remarks, which it may be supposed, not improperly, to suggest to our minds.

Let us observe, then, first, that human
life

life may be considered as a journey, in which mankind are travelling together, and in which they are closely connected with each other. The sons of Jacob had a long journey before them, from the land of Egypt to Palestine; and this journey they were under a necessity of carrying on in conjunction. At the same time, they were naturally united by the closest ties; being, indeed, the offspring of one father. The point, also, which they had in view, was to get back again in safety to their proper habitations, to their own families, and to the house of their ancient and venerable fire.

Similar, in many respects, is the situation of all the children of Adam. We have been brought into existence by the volition and power of the Parent and Governor of the world; and nothing but his volition and power could have breathed into us the breath of life. Justly may we say, in the language of the prophet, "Have we not
" all one Father, hath not one God created
" us *?" Yes, this is undoubtedly the case; and he hath created us, too, with like

* Malachi ii. 10.

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faculties, both of body and mind. For the proof of this, we need only appeal to universal experience. Notwithstanding some little differences that may take place between individuals, or between parts of the human species, we are, in general, constituted the same. We have the same corporal parts, whether inward or outward; and we are endued with the same appetites, affections, principles, and faculties.

Are not the ends, likewise, for which we have been introduced upon the earth exactly similar? Did not the Supreme Being intend that we should, every one of us, discharge the business, offices, and duties respecting the present state? Did he not intend, moreover, that we should prepare for a future life? Is it not his design that we should endeavour to obtain the best knowledge, and cultivate the most amiable dispositions? And, are we not placed here as candidates for immortality?

While, too, we are inhabitants of these inferior abodes, are we not partakers of the same blessings and the same calamities? It cannot be denied that we are all of us sharers

sharers in the rich and abundant mercies with which our heavenly Father hath stored this lower scene. We all of us enjoy the bounties of creation and providence; we are all of us endued with personal advantages, and favoured with social and relative comforts and endearments. There is, indeed, a considerable difference in these respects, and some persons are surrounded with a greater number and variety of external benefits than others; but still it cannot be said, with regard to any of us, that we are neglected or forsaken by our omnipotent and gracious Benefactor. Neither can it be denied, that we are all of us liable to the attacks of affliction and distress. This is a warfare from which God hath not thought proper to exempt any one of his rational creatures below. Pain and anguish are, more or less, and in some shape or other, for wise and important reasons, the determined portion of every human being.

Do we not tend, also, to the same conclusion? Yes, we pursue exactly the like course. If our continuance here be per-

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mitted for the utmost possible length of time, do not we advance from infancy to youth, from youth to maturity, from maturity to old age; and, at last, drop into the silent grave? Is not that the house appointed for all the living? We know that it is the house appointed for all the living. We know that the former generations of men have been swept away from the face of the earth; that the present generations will shortly follow them; and that this will be the case with the generations that are yet to come.

Thus life may be considered as a journey, in which mankind are travelling together; and they are, likewise, during the progress of this journey, closely connected with each other. We do not pursue the path allotted us, as separate and independent beings; but are necessarily united with those who are going along with us in the same road. Indeed, without some union with our fellow-creatures, our situation would be extremely uncomfortable; and the roughnesses and difficulties of the way we walk in, would appear tenfold more disagreeable and

and painful. Accordingly, our heavenly Father hath placed us in various relations, which are more or less diversified, agreeably to the different parts we are destined to sustain in the system of things. The remotest connection we have with each other is that of man to man; and yet this is a connection which will often be found to be highly important. It involves in it many duties and obligations; and there are frequent instances wherein our partaking of one common nature ties us very closely together, and greatly contributes to the happiness of life. The knot is drawn still closer, if we happen to be natives of the same country. From the circumstances of our being born and educated in a particular state or kingdom, of our enjoying its privileges, of our being subject to its laws, of our sharing in its interests, arise strong additional reasons for our mutual attachment and regard. This attachment and regard will be heightened by our being members of the same religious community. The belief of the same doctrines, the worshipping of our God and Father in the same manner,

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and the pursuing of the same path in the way to immortal salvation, cannot fail of becoming peculiarly endearing bonds of union.

Besides these general principles of connection, we form personal intimacies with each other, whereby we enter into a lively feeling of our mutual pains and pleasures. Sometimes, too, these personal intimacies rise to the fervours of an exalted friendship; which unites kindred souls together with a closeness inexpressibly tender and engaging.

But to bind mankind in the chains of mutual affection, was a matter so essential to their welfare, that the God and Parent of mercies did not think proper to leave them to the operation of more universal sentiments, or to the precariousness of accidental combinations. He hath, therefore, joined us to one another by the ties of blood. He hath implanted those powerful instincts within us, which urge us to the formation of families; whence spring the sweetest relations of life, and the charities of father, son, and brother. In families, the
union

union that subsists between the human race is drawn to its nearest point. Here it is that the marriage engagement takes place, with its various endearments and obligations: here it is that a reciprocal connection is rendered indissoluble, and becomes essential to our felicity. Thus united, then, as men are to men, it must be of the highest importance for them to maintain a mutual agreement and harmony. And yet there is too much foundation for a second

Observation arising from the text, which is, that there is danger of falling out by the way. Joseph apprehended this with regard to his brethren; for otherwise he would scarcely have advised them to guard against quarrelling: and, indeed, he had very good reason for his caution to them, as he knew that their former conduct had done no credit to their prudence and temper.

So, likewise, in the general course of human life, there is considerable hazard of our being involved in some degree of dispute and contention. Though we are bound together by such strong ties, though our obligations to concord and affection are so numerous

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merous and so engaging, yet there are many circumstances which contribute to interrupt our tranquillity and union, and to set us at variance with each other. Even slight misapprehensions and mistakes are often sufficient to produce this unhappy effect. Bitter animosities do sometimes arise from such trivial causes, that we frequently find ourselves at a loss to be able to say what it was that gave occasion to the contest. The truth of the case is, that our own pride and self-importance lie at the bottom of the matter. If these be, in any respect, disappointed, we are apt to entertain a severe dislike against those who, designedly or undesignedly, fail to pay us that attention which we look upon as our due.

But the most powerful and extensive source of disagreement is, a competition of interests. It is a competition of interests that sets states and kingdoms in flames, and which produces contentions and hatred among private persons, families, and societies. It is this, or the imagination of this, that is the spring of innumerable evils.

Religious differences are, likewise, a
mighty

mighty cause of the disputes and aversions that have taken place in the earth. In consequence of religious differences, mankind have been ready to view one another in a light peculiarly odious, and to cherish the most unfriendly, and even the most malignant, sentiments. The quarrels that have arisen from this origin have been always too generally prevalent; and it is, alas! to be feared that they will continue to prevail for ages yet to come.

Several other circumstances might be mentioned, from which there is a danger of our falling out by the way; but for the proof of the reality of such a danger, nothing farther is necessary than an appeal to a fatal and almost an universal experience. What does the history of the world principally contain, but the history of the desolations and slaughters that have been occasioned by contending nations? Do not wars rise up, in perpetual succession, as we turn over the melancholy pages, till we see almost the whole earth covered with blood?

If we examine the state of particular countries, with regard to themselves, independently

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pendently of the kingdoms around them, shall we not be sensible that they are frequently disturbed by intestine commotions? Shall we not perceive that they are torn to pieces by parties and factions, whose animosities, perhaps, end at last in the utmost horrors of civil discord? If we direct our view to narrower districts, or to single towns, shall we not behold them giving way to variance and ill-will; and this, in consequence of absurd and trifling divisions?

It were well, however, if the spirit of contention were extended no farther; if it did not enter into the nearer and dearer relations of life. But, such is human weakness, that the persons who are the most closely connected with each other, who are bound together by the strongest ties, are too apt to forget their mutual obligations, and to indulge a litigious and angry disposition. Hence it is, that we see neighbours and acquaintance enflamed with resentment and hatred. Hence it is, that even the love of bosom friends is turned into dislike and rancour. Hence it is, that those who partake of the same blood regard one another as no better

better than aliens and enemies. Hence it is, that private houses, which ought to be the residences of the sweetest comforts, are rendered the abodes of strife and disorder. Hence it is, that, in the language of our blessed Saviour, "the father is divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law *." Hence it is, that husbands and wives, instead of cultivating a perfect harmony, spend their days in a continual course of altercation, reproaches, and anger.

From this representation of the actual state of things in a vast number of instances, and from considering the nature of the passions of men, and the opposition of their interests, it is evident that there is, and must be, a danger, while they travel the journey of life together, of their falling out by the way. But we may observe,

Thirdly, that the falling out by the way

* Luke xii. 53.

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will be attended with very evil consequences.

It was from an apprehension of the bad effects that might arise from their quarrelling, as well as from a knowledge of their particular temper, that Joseph was induced to give his brethren the advice contained in the text. Considering the unsettled state of society in that period and part of the world, a long journey could not be undertaken with safety, without the utmost caution. The sons of Jacob had a wild and uncultivated tract of land to pass through, during which they might be exposed to the attacks of the wandering tribes that were likely to meet them upon the road. It did, therefore, highly behove them not to disagree among themselves; that thus, being firmly united, and being always disposed to assist each other, they might stand upon their guard, and be preserved from destruction. If, instead of this, they had neglected the counsel of their wise and excellent brother, the result might have been fatal to them.

So, likewise, in the common course of human life, dreadful consequences must proceed from animosity, strife, and hatred.

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Were we to enlarge on the miseries that have actually been produced by these causes, a wide field of matter would open upon us. The time would fail us to tell of the ravages, the devastations, the bloodshed, that have been occasioned by the wars between the kings and princes of the earth. The time would fail us to tell of the calamities and horrors that have sprung from civil commotions and discord. The time would fail us to tell of the confiscations, the imprisonments, the hardships, the tortures, the cruel deaths that have arisen from religious fury.

But, to descend to more private connections: the least observation will convince us, that variance, dislike, anger, and aversion, must be attended with the worst effects. If neighbours quarrel with neighbours, acquaintance with acquaintance, and friends with friends; if the nearest relations forget the ties of blood, and look with hostile eyes upon one another; if brother be enraged against brother, the parent against the child, or the child against the parent; if the husband beholds the wife, or the wife

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the husband, with indignation or abhorrence, how wretched must be the consequences! The sweetest, the most engaging, pleasures of life are those which spring from our social connections. The most heartfelt satisfactions are such as flow from domestic union, peace, and harmony. But if these be dissolved, by a spirit of animosity and contention, what a sad scene must necessarily succeed! In that case the external interests of families must be greatly affected, and their weightiest concerns be often thrown into confusion and distress. But, what is more important still, in that case, the minds of men will receive the deepest injury. The minds of men will be deprived of that inward tranquillity which is their highest blessing, and will become the seats of base and malignant passions. Is it not truly deplorable to have the soul deformed and disgraced? But such it must be, if it be the slave of boisterous contentions, and resentful dispositions.

The effects of a temper of this kind must be extremely bad, if we consider the matter in a moral and religious light. What can be
more

more contrary to the genius, what more contrary to the precepts of the gospel than strife, anger, and hatred? Does not the christian revelation perpetually urge upon us the loveliest, the gentlest graces and virtues? What was the character, and what the deportment, of our blessed Saviour? Was not his character altogether composed of benevolence, humanity, mildness, and courtesy? Was not his deportment perfectly peaceable, kind, and tender? Did he ever engage in angry debates and quarrels with his neighbours? Did he ever disturb the repose of those around him, by a contentious and turbulent behaviour? Did he ever give way to the feelings of resentment and malice? On the contrary, was it not his intention to render us truly the sons of peace; to make us at peace with God, at peace with ourselves, and at peace with each other? For this purpose, he endured the labours and sufferings of this mortal life, and for this purpose he died upon the cross. He hath set before us the strongest motives, and laid us under the highest obligations, to cultivate the utmost friendship, agree-

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ment,

ment, and harmony with our fellow-creatures. If, therefore, we are possessed of a different disposition; if our hearts are full of wrath, and strife, and rancour; if we fall out by the way, and turn the earth, as far as in us lies, into a dreary and uncomfortable scene, what will be the consequence? Why, as by such a temper and conduct we act directly reverse to the genius and design of our holy religion, the consequence must be, to the last degree, fatal. If we have not the spirit of Christ, we can be none of his. We must, in such a case, have our portion with those who were contentious, who did not obey the truth, and who were the slaves of their corrupt and turbulent passions. We observe once more,

Fourthly, that it behoves us to be strictly on our guard against falling out by the way. This thought is expressly included in the language of the text. "See," saith Joseph to his brethren, "that ye fall not out by the way." Take heed that ye do not suffer yourselves to be drawn into animosities and quarrels. He well knew that they stood in need of the caution, and that it would be-
come

come them to be very careful not to offend against it. And that mankind, in general, stand in need of the same caution, is evident from all that has been already said. Since we are in danger of being involved in strifes and contentions, if we do not watch diligently our own breasts; and since the being involved in strifes and contentions will be followed by the worst of evils; it is certainly incumbent upon us to be extremely vigilant with regard to our disposition and behaviour.

A mighty additional motive to circumspection arises from the happy effects that will be the result of living in tranquillity and union with our fellow-creatures. By cultivating an agreement and friendship with those around us; by preserving the closest bonds of harmony with our neighbours, our acquaintance, our relatives, and families, we shall most effectually provide for our present welfare and prosperity. By these means we shall secure the purest, the serenest, the sweetest joys that earth can afford. By these means we shall ennoble and dignify our minds. By these means we

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shall acquire a resemblance to our blessed Saviour and our great Creator. By these means we shall, in some measure, lead the life of heaven below, and be qualified for the sacred delights of the mansions above. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*." Behold how good and how pleasant it is for all mankind to dwell together in unity. Did brethren, did all mankind dwell together in unity, this terrestrial globe would be a paradise, and we should have, while we continue inhabitants of these inferior abodes, a delightful foretaste of the celestial felicity.

If any thing farther were necessary to engage us to be solicitous that we do not fall out by the way, it might be added, that it is not a long time wherein we shall be permitted to travel in the same road. One or another of us is perpetually removing into eternity; and when our friends and companions in the journey of life are taken away, we shall reflect upon it with regret and concern, if we have not behaved to them

* Psalm cxxxiii. 1.

as we ought; if we have not treated them according to their characters, and the relations we stood in towards them; if we have not manifested the regard which belonged to them, as fellow creatures, fellow Christians, and heirs of immortality.

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Let us, therefore, be constantly on our guard against those principles, prejudices, and passions that tend to alienate our hearts from each other. Let us endeavour to throw aside mean and narrow views and purposes, and to cultivate the most enlarged and generous sentiments and affections. Let us, in particular, be cautious in giving offence, and slow in taking it. By being cautious in giving offence, we shall avoid the causes of strife, and shall secure the general esteem and good-will of mankind. By being slow in taking offence, we shall preserve many a valuable friendship that would otherwise be broken; and shall pass through the world with a tranquillity and satisfaction to which hasty and resentful persons are strangers. Indeed, I have had much occasion to observe, that the things which are taken for affronts, and are frequently

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improved into violent quarrels, are often the result of mere inadvertency and inattention, and by no means proceed from any settled design, or from a malignity of temper. In all such cases, where no positive injury is intended, though there may be a considerable deficiency in external respect, I have laid it down as a rule to myself, and would recommend it to others, entirely to overlook them.

And, now, if my voice could be heard, I would earnestly call upon all the children of Adam, who are travelling in the road of life, not to fall out by the way. I would call upon the nations of the earth to lay aside their jealousies and enmities, and to unite together in the bonds of peace. Could my voice be heard, I would ardently and affectionately call upon the bigots and persecutors of the globe, no longer to violate the rights of conscience; but to grant to every man the privilege of worshipping his God and Father, in the manner that is agreeable to the dictates of his own mind.

But it must suffice for me to address each of you in your personal and private capacities.

ties. In your personal and private capacities, therefore, permit me to beseech you, that ye fall not out by the way. Be persuaded, since ye are disciples of the same heavenly Teacher, and servants of the same Master, to live in love, even as Christ also loved you; and do not permit any differences in religious sentiments to interrupt the harmonious agreement with which it behoves you to march on in the road that leads to the mansions of glory. As neighbours and acquaintance, be ready to perform every office of kindness and humanity. Let those who are joined in the bonds of a particular friendship be solicitous not to break so delightful an union. Let relatives remember and discharge all the obligations arising from the ties of blood. Let private houses, in particular, be temples consecrated to unanimity, tenderness, and affection; and, that this may effectually be done, let them likewise be temples consecrated to piety and devotion. Religion, well understood, and received in its genuine spirit, will be the best foundation of domestic peace and pleasure. In short, let each of us, in our several stations

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and connections, be studious to cultivate the sentiments of universal meekness, good-will, and benevolence; and let us constantly attend to the mighty arguments and motives to this purpose, which are set before us in the gospel. If thus we be careful not to fall out by the way, we shall enjoy the truest satisfactions which the present life can afford, and shall be preparing for the realms of complete concord and blessedness. Amen!

SERMON

S E R M O N XII.

The EXAMPLE of JESUS in his YOUTH,
recommended to Imitation.

LUKE ii. 52.

*And Jesus increased in wisdom, and stature,
and in favour with God and man.*

G R E A T numbers of persons have, without doubt, sincerely wished that the history of our Saviour's youth had been more full and particular: and it must be acknowledged, that such a circumstance would have been extremely agreeable to that curiosity which is implanted in the human mind. It would furnish a delightful entertainment to read the remarkable sayings or actions of his infancy, to contemplate the progress of his knowledge, to learn the sentiments of his neighbours concerning him, and to survey the manner in which he was employed,

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employed, before he entered upon his grand work.

But, however pleasing this might be, the providence of God hath ordered it otherwise, for valuable reasons. The scriptures were not written to gratify an inquisitive disposition, but to promote our spiritual instruction, our inward holiness, and our immortal felicity. In this view, it was proper for them to contain such things only as were more immediately connected with the salvation of man; and, of course, chiefly to insist on our Lord's public ministry. The evidence of his divine authority, the nature and design of his revelation, and such of his transactions as had an intimate relation to the scheme of our redemption, were the affairs alone with which it was necessary for us to be acquainted: and had other matters been treated of, the sacred volumes would have been enlarged to a degree that would have rendered them less useful in themselves, and less capable of being perused, digested, and remembered.

But though little is said of the early life of our great master, yet the little which is said is enough to convince us that his conduct

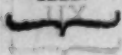
duct was entirely excellent and engaging; and that it held out an admirable model of the attainments and accomplishments which should be zealously recommended and enforced upon those who are in the days of their youth. To shew this, I have pitched upon the beautiful description given of him by St. Luke, that "he increased in wisdom, and stature, and in favour with God and man."

In treating upon these words I shall endeavour to point out the virtues which we may suppose entitled the blessed Jesus to the character of the text; and which should be possessed by all young persons, in order to their obtaining the same character.

And, first, one of the virtues which, we may suppose, entitled the blessed Jesus to the character of the text, was a regard to God in the whole of his behaviour. This is a virtue of essential importance, and very extensive in its nature. It is, indeed, a virtue which is the proper foundation of every other attainment, and which, in its genuine influences and effects, includes all the graces of the spiritual life. How early this divine temper

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temper began to display itself in the Saviour, we might well conclude from the account of the text, had we no other testimonies. For he would not so speedily have advanced into such peculiar favour with the Supreme Being, unless he had been eminent for the devotion, obedience, and love which he maintained towards him. But our Lord's staying at Jerusalem, after Joseph and Mary had set out for Galilee, affords an extraordinary instance of the warmth of the principle of piety that animated his breast, and of the earnest zeal which he had for the honour of God, when he was no more than twelve years of age. Such was the delight which he took in the sacred entertainments of the temple, that he could not easily persuade himself to depart from them: and when his mother expostulated with him, with all the tender anxiety and vehemence which are so natural to a parent's heart, his answer was, "How is it that ye sought me, "knew ye not that I must be about my "Father's business?" or, as some would render the words, "Did ye not know that "I ought to be at my Father's house?"

Thus

Thus we see that the first exercise of his rational powers was in the service, and for the honour of the eternal Jehovah.

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This, too, is the manner in which all young persons should set out, in their passage through the world. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom *;" and, therefore, the fear of the Lord should early take place in their minds, as the only principle that can guide them safe through the path of life, and lead them on to a glorious immortality. They should remember their Creator in the days of their youth; remember him as a Being who is eternal, independent, the Maker and Governor of the Universe; as that Being who hath an absolute right to their veneration, affection, obedience, and submission; as that Being who hath brought them into existence, hath loaded them with kindnesses, and is the source of all the happiness they enjoy. Hence they should consecrate their opening faculties to the great Fountain of perfection and bliss; and maintain a perpetual intercourse with their heavenly Father, by praising him for his mercies; by seeking to

* Psalm cxi. 10.

him

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him for all needful supplies, whether temporal or spiritual; by loving his most holy name, and by complying with his commandments. Such a regard to the Almighty as produces these excellent effects, is certainly one of the dispositions by which young persons should grow up into the favour of God and man. How acceptable youthful piety is to God, is plain from the honourable mention that, in this view, is made of Josiah and of Timothy; and from that divine promise of religious wisdom, Prov. viii. 17. "Those that seek me early, shall find me." Nor can we doubt but that youthful piety will be proportionably acceptable to good men. All those who are themselves the sincere servants of Jehovah, will esteem it a charming sight to behold the rising age devoted to their Maker: nay, even the wicked cannot refrain from acknowledging and admiring the beauty of such a prospect.

Secondly, another of the attainments which, we may suppose, entitled the blessed Jesus to the character of the text, was his great proficiency in valuable knowledge.

That

That this proficiency was very great, though he had not the advantages of a liberal education, is represented to us at large, in the account of his staying at Jerusalem before-mentioned. When Joseph and Mary had returned to that city, they found him sitting in the midst of the teachers of the law, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And we are expressly informed, that all who heard him were astonished; were in a transport of admiration, at his understanding and answers. Nor could even his parents, though better acquainted with the sublimity of his genius, and the dawnings of heavenly light that appeared in him, avoid being struck with wonder. That his advancement in knowledge was surprizing and uncommon, is evident from the repeated testimonies of sacred writ. Thus, in the text, we are told that "he increased in wisdom, as he increased in stature;" and in the fortieth verse of the chapter, we read that "the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom." Indeed, we have reason to believe that he had peculiar communications from heaven, to assist him

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in the prosecution of these divine attainments. In this respect, as well as in others, the grace, the favour of God was upon him in an extraordinary manner. But, notwithstanding his being thus illuminated from above in early life, yet, that he was not willing to neglect the ordinary methods of acquiring instruction, is manifest from the inquiries he proposed to the doctors in the temple; one end of which undoubtedly was to obtain such information, in matters of importance, as these doctors were able to afford him.

And is not the example of the Saviour, in this respect, highly worthy to be imitated by such as are in the days of their youth? Though young persons cannot have the same supernatural opportunities for knowledge which Jesus had, yet their gracious Creator hath provided, in the common course of things, that all the knowledge may be obtained by them which is necessary to present and future happiness. That we should become acquainted with our Maker, with ourselves, and with the concerns of an eternal world, is one grand purpose for which we were created; and, consequently,

consequently, such as are children in years, should endeavour to be, as little as possible, children in understanding. Ignorance, in general, is the bane of human life; and in divine things it is particularly hurtful; for it brings along with it not only present but future infamy and ruin. Whereas it is a progressive improvement in the science of moral, of spiritual, and of eternal objects, which will distinguish us from the brutes, give us an alliance with angels, and a resemblance to the Divinity. It is a progressive improvement in the science of moral, of spiritual, and of eternal objects, which will adorn, direct, and bless the life of man; render us valuable members of society, and train us up for immortality. Now, the sooner young persons seek after heavenly wisdom, the greater advances they will make in it, and a surer foundation will be laid for their substantial honour and felicity. Should not, therefore, the youthful part of mankind open their ears betimes to the voice of instruction, that they may join with the increase of age an increase of favour with God and man? Must it not be peculiarly agreeable to the Father of
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lights, when his intelligent offspring apply to that early cultivation of their rational faculties which shall render them, in some measure, like to himself? And will not the lovers of goodness be delighted when they behold the rising generation earnestly enquiring for the path of truth, duty, and eternal happiness?

Thirdly, another of the virtues which, we may suppose, entitled the blessed Jesus to the character of the text, was his obedience to his parents. That he was obedient to his parents, we are expressly told in the preceding verse; and the evangelist appears to have mentioned it on purpose to remove any doubt that might, in this view, lie upon the mind, on account of what had been recorded just before. It might, perhaps, have been surmised, that our Saviour's stay in Jerusalem, and his answer to his mother, when she found him in the temple, were not entirely consistent with the reverence which was due to her. But St. Luke takes away the ground of any suspicion of that kind, by informing us that our Lord went down with Joseph and Mary, and came to
 “ Nazareth,

“ Nazareth, and was subject unto them.”

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His tarrying behind was, perhaps, done by a superior direction ; and when he had performed his heavenly Father's will, he returned to that regular course of submission which he always exercised towards his earthly parents. As he was obedient to them during his childhood and youth, so, when he arrived to mature age, he did not omit every proper instance of respect. This is particularly evident from his dying recommendation of his mother, to his beloved disciple, St. John ; in consequence of which that amiable apostle immediately took her to his own house, and, in conformity to his divine Master's affecting intimation, behaved to her as a son.

I am not insensible that there seems to be something harsh in the answer which Christ gave to Mary, when they were present together at the marriage of Cana in Galilee ; “ Woman, what have I to do with thee ? mine hour is not yet come.” But this harshness only arises from the different methods of address which prevailed in former times. For the word,

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Woman,

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Woman, in the ancient countries and ages, was frequently addressed to ladies of the highest distinction and quality. We find our Saviour making use of it in his dying recommendation just referred to, "Woman, behold thy Son:" and *that*, we are sure, was a time when he treated his mother with the utmost tenderness and regard. As to another expression in his answer, "what have I to do with thee?" It might as well be rendered, 'What hast thou to do with me?' and is no more than a gentle rebuke to Mary, for prescribing to him in the exercise of his miracles; which was certainly a matter wherein she had not the least right to interpose.

If then, the blessed Jesus, who was, more peculiarly than other men, the Son of the Most High God, condescended to obey, not the virgin alone, who was instrumental of bringing him into the world, but even Joseph, who was only his reputed father, ought not the same temper and conduct to be considered as absolutely incumbent upon all young persons?

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The ties of duty to our parents are particularly strong and affecting. Our parents derive a right to our submission from their having been the means of introducing us into life: but this right is abundantly enforced by the care they have taken of us, and the blessings they have poured upon our heads. It would not be easy to express the anxious concern that resides in a father and a mother's breast, for the preservation and welfare of their offspring. It would not be easy to express the tenderness they manifest for their children, the pains they go through to make them happy, and the mighty benefits they confer upon them in the course of their education.

Indeed, so vast are our obligations to the terrestrial authors of our existence, that not to revere them would be quite unnatural; and those who can treat them with ingratitude, disobedience, and contempt, are monsters of the worst kind. Nay, the pert forwardness of some, who are not otherwise, it may be, very undutiful, is extremely disagreeable to a delicate and thinking mind. Nothing can more recommend the rising

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generation to the esteem of mankind in general, and to the regard of the wise and good in particular, than their being early distinguished by a respectful, affectionate, and submissive behaviour towards their parents: and that such a behaviour is equally acceptable to our great Creator, is fully proved by the fifth commandment, which is the only one that hath an immediate promise of the divine temporal favour. The same precept is renewed and re-enforced by our Lord himself; who, in so doing, hath added his high authority to his excellent and amiable example.

Fourthly, another of the virtues which, we may suppose, entitled the blessed Jesus to the character of the text, was his diligence. Notwithstanding his heavenly original, he appears to have embraced the trade of his reputed father, and to have been an artificer; whether in wood, or some other material, is not, perhaps, absolutely certain; though it is most probable, from the general use of the original term in Greek writers, that it was in wood. By this trade, whatever it was, he did, in all likelihood, provide

for his support; and it is reasonable to believe that he continued in it till near the time of his public ministry.

Now, what a noble pattern of laudable industry, did our Saviour, by such a conduct, afford! If Christ did not think mechanical labour beneath him, much less should we grudge some degree of toil, who cannot, without it, properly discharge the part allotted us in life! No ranks or conditions of men are to be exempted from diligence, in one shape or other: for without the exertion of it the rich and the great would be as little able to perform the duty that lies upon them, as those who are in the meanest circumstances. It is not only requisite to our temporal subsistence and accommodation, but it is absolutely necessary, likewise, to the cultivation of our minds, our general usefulness in the world, and our advancement in piety and universal goodness. On the contrary, idleness is the parent of poverty, the bane of every thing rational, manly, and social; the inlet to temptation, and the source of evil thoughts, and evil actions,

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Young persons, therefore, should early cultivate that habit of industry on which their present and eternal welfare depends. They should engage in an earnest prosecution of the various purposes of life, and an ardent pursuit of the grand end of their being. Thus will they become qualified for the approbation, the confidence, the favour of the valuable part of mankind; and thus will they please that God who did not intend that our faculties should be buried in sloth; but who gave them to be actively employed for our own advantage, for the benefit of our fellow creatures, and for the honour of our Maker. Pools of standing water soon grow corrupt, offensive, and unwholesome; whereas the running stream continues clear, and pure, and healthful.

Fifthly, the humility and modesty of Jesus were among the virtues which, we may suppose, entitled him to the character of the text; and which should be possessed by young persons in general, in order to their obtaining the same character. Such was the condescension of our Lord, that he appeared

peared in a mean station of life; and when he was found in this condition, his conduct was entirely suited to it; for he was meek and lowly in heart. He claimed none of the prerogatives that might appear due to his high dignity; but became the servant of all. Though he was the great, the promised Messiah, he led his youth in privacy, and made no pretences to distinction.

Nor have we any reason to doubt but that his modesty was equal to his humility. When he had entered upon his public ministry, when miracles attended his voice, when he was surrounded with applauding multitudes, we find nothing vain, nothing assuming, in his behaviour. May we not, therefore, be well assured that he possessed the same disposition, before he appeared on the stage of open action?

Perhaps, his conduct in the temple, when he was about twelve years old, may be thought inconsistent with what has been said: but it will not be deemed so, when that affair is rightly considered. For as to his hearing the doctors, and asking them questions, there seems to be no more

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in it than what was customary. It was the design of these meetings that the teachers of the law should give instruction to such as desired it; and, therefore, every one had a liberty to seek for information, and to propose his doubts. Our Saviour did not go up unto the seats of the preceptors, and dispute with them, as is often imagined, but sat at their feet as a learner: so that the whole affair was transacted with the utmost decency.

And was Christ so lowly, so humble, so unassuming? What a lovely pattern, then, hath he given to young persons! They, surely, have abundant reason for humility and modesty, because they know so little of themselves, of mankind, and of things in general. As youth must of necessity be greatly deficient in wisdom and experience, there is a particular impropriety in their being haughty, proud, and vain. They should, therefore, possess humility and modesty of mind, if they would excel in qualities which are allowed by all to be peculiarly amiable and becoming. We generally and justly pre-
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sume that where these virtues exist, there is merit. And though it may sometimes happen that such as have, otherwise, great accomplishments, are not without a considerable tincture of vanity and self-conceit, yet this circumstance is a degradation of their characters; and, upon the whole, it will be found that humility and modesty are the surest tests of worth and goodness. That these attainments are as agreeable to God as they are to man, is plain from the reason of things, and from the express declarations of scripture; which informs us that "he resisteth the proud, but giveth grace," or favour, "to the humble*."

Sixthly, another of the virtues which, we may suppose, entitled the blessed Jesus to the character in the text, was his integrity. With what steadiness our Saviour pursued the work which the Almighty had appointed him to perform, and adhered to truth, though he was opposed by the malice of his inveterate enemies, is evident from his whole history. And that this disposition prevailed in him betimes, may be collected

* James iv. 6.

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from his conversation with the doctors in the temple. For it is probable, among other things, that he modestly insinuated some objections to their traditions, and their false interpretations of the law. He was then about his heavenly Father's business; and when that was the case, nothing could divert him from the course of his duty. When the cause of God, when the interests of religion, when the instruction and happiness of immortal beings were in question, no veneration for established names and opinions could allure him, no power of the mighty could terrify him from declaring and acting what was right.

I need not say how becoming such a temper as this is in young people. A fervent affection for, and an invariable regard to truth, in all their words, and all their actions, is one of the first things which should be deeply impressed upon their minds. A violation of truth debases our rational nature, exposes us to contempt, overturns the basis of social peace and order, and must be highly disagreeable to that Being who hates every false way. On the contrary, an inflexible regard to it affords

fords a solid and inward satisfaction, obtains an honourable reputation in the world, and recommends us to that God whose veracity and rectitude can never fail. If, therefore, the rising generation would lay a just foundation for the favour of men, and, above all, for the favour of the eternal Deity, they should have their conversation in simplicity and godly sincerity, and be, like Nathaniel, "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile *."

Seventhly, another of the virtues which, we may suppose, entitled the blessed Jesus to the character of the text, was his moderation. By moderation I here understand the whole management of our appetites and desires; as including temperance and chastity, with regard to sensual gratifications; contentment with respect to the dispensations of Providence; and meekness with reference to the government of our passions of anger and revenge. Now, must not that Saviour, who submitted to a mean condition in life, who endured the greatest afflictions without a repining word, who, "when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered,

* John i. 47.

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“threatened not *;” have possessed moderation in the most extensive sense of the word, and in the highest degree? If we search his history with the utmost exactness, we shall find nothing that leads to excess, nothing wanton, nothing uneasy, nothing boisterous in his temper and behaviour. On the contrary, we shall meet with the strictest abstinence and self-denial, the most unreserved acquiescence in the determinations of his heavenly Father, and the most consummate patience and gentleness under all the calumnies and injuries of his enemies. Such magnanimity of mind, as his was, must certainly have had its foundation in the early part of his life; and it is of absolute importance that youth, in general, should begin in the same manner. On the regulation of their desires, the true excellence of their characters, and their real happiness, essentially depend. And, unless this regulation takes place in them betimes, they will become the slaves of appetite and passion, than which there cannot be a more ignominious, a more detestable, or a more wretched slavery. Young persons, there-

* 1 Peter ii. 23.

fore, should exercise the great duty of self-government. They should keep their wishes within the bounds of temperance and chastity; consider that station of life as the best which Providence hath appointed; and be mild, gentle, and patient. It is on the side of sensual pleasure that the first and most dangerous attacks will be made upon their virtue; for which reason a double guard should be set on that side. And if, through the blessing of the Almighty, they do actually attain the universal moderation we are speaking of, they will then secure their true interest and glory: they will then be amiable in the eyes of men, and be regarded with approbation by that God who bestowed his temporal blessings upon us to be used, but not to be abused; and who implanted certain desires and affections in our breasts, not that they should have dominion over us, but that they should be directed to the purposes of wisdom and goodness. Once more,

Another of the virtues which, we may suppose, entitled the blessed Jesus to the character of the text, was his benevolence. A
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quality which shone with such amazing lustre in the whole conduct of our Lord, must have early displayed itself in his mind. Indeed, it was love, surprizing love, which animated his life from its opening to its concluding period, and by which he continues to be animated in his state of exaltation. The Saviour was, therefore, without doubt, in his younger years, and in his private station, remarkable for the sweetness of his disposition, and for the readiness with which he engaged in every humane and benevolent action. Though he then moved in a less extensive sphere, his heart burned with the same flame of kindness, generosity, and compassion, which afterwards broke out with such astonishing ardour; and it was his employment and delight to do good. This seems to be intimated in the text, when it is said that "he increased in favour with God and man." For God will be particularly pleased with the exercise of that temper which hath the nearest resemblance to his most distinguished and darling attribute; and nothing attracts the esteem and affection of our fellow

fellow creatures so much as humanity and mercy.

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Now, doth not this charming behaviour of our Lord afford a noble example of the amiable and benevolent dispositions which should be possessed by every youthful mind? All young persons, therefore, should early cultivate the tender and social feelings. They should abhor the least instance of cruelty, even to brutes; and, with respect to men, should entertain those kind, generous, and beneficent sentiments, which will inspire them with universal candour and charity; and make them solicitous to spread happiness around them, and to promote the harmony and union of the world. We need not stay to prove that the exertions of such pleasing affections will be highly applauded by our brethren of human nature, and peculiarly agreeable to our heavenly Father. That benevolence demands the veneration, the love, the praises of our fellow creatures, is evident to the slightest observation; and that God singularly delights in it, is plain from all his nature and from all his conduct; from all the precepts and motives with re-

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lation to it, which he hath set before us; precepts and motives so numerous and so strong, that it would require a great length of time to exhibit them in their proper light.

Thus we have endeavoured to point out the virtues which, we may suppose, entitled the blessed Jesus to the character of the text; and which should be possessed by all young persons, in order to their obtaining the same character.

And now, from what has been said, we may perceive the importance and necessity of the religious education of youth. The virtues we have had occasion to mention, are such as make the possessors of them increase in favour with God and man. They are virtues most lovely and excellent in themselves; absolutely necessary to deliver us from the deepest misery, and to procure us the highest bliss our natures are capable of, both for the present and the future life. What, therefore, can be more essentially momentous than to inculcate these attainments and graces upon young persons as early as possible? An assiduous care, in

this respect, may, by the blessing of the Almighty, preserve the rising generation from infamy and ruin, and lay a solid foundation for their temporal and eternal felicity.

If parents, therefore, to whom the forming the minds of the next age is consigned, neglect the dear objects committed to their charge, their conduct will be inexpressibly absurd, inexpressibly cruel, and inexpressibly wicked. Into your hands, O! ye fathers and mothers, ye relatives that supply their places, ye guardians and tutors, hath the Almighty put the greatest trust that can possibly be put into the hand of man; and he hath appointed, in the course of his providence, that on your execution of this trust, the knowledge, the piety, the goodness, the welfare of posterity, shall principally depend. What words, then, can sufficiently describe the importance of the duty that lies upon you! All words are entirely unequal to the task of describing the importance of the duty that lies upon you! May your attention to the discharge of it, be proportionable to its importance!

To conclude; let us be solicitous to imi-

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tate the character which is given of Jesus in the text. This is an exhortation that may, with propriety, be addressed to persons of all ages and stations. There is not one of the virtues I have specified, excepting that of subjection to parents, but what we may each of us justly be called upon to transcribe into our own tempers, and to maintain in our own conduct. Are not the youthful and the aged alike obliged to have a regard to their Maker in the whole of their deportment, to cultivate valuable knowledge, and to live in the exercise of diligence, humility, integrity, moderation, and benevolence?

But I would particularly urge it upon young persons, that they should endeavour to excel in these divine attainments. Ye have heard what the virtues were, which adorned the opening scene of the Redeemer, when he dwelt upon earth. Ye must have reflected that they are virtues in themselves most excellent and becoming. Ye have seen what a happy tendency they have to make you increase in favour with God and man. Can it, then, be needful for me to

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persuade you to seek after such lovely, such valuable accomplishments? Some of you, it may be, are studious to adorn your persons with propriety and elegance; and there is nothing blameable in a decent regard to the dress of the body. But should not the dress of the mind claim your first and principal attention? *That* is the point which should never be forgotten, if you have any concern for your real ornament, your real glory, and your real felicity. Be induced, therefore, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ; to put on the graces of his character, as the cloathing the most essentially necessary, and the most truly amiable. And, that you may advance to higher and higher improvements, look up to the Almighty with earnest supplications, that, by his divine aid, you may be transformed more and more after the image of the Saviour. Amen.

The Evil Effects of a Life of Sensual Pleasures.
I Timothy vi. 6-10.
But for that love of money, which is the root of all evil, which we have seen in the case of the rich man, and which is the cause of all our misery and sorrow, we should be content with our simple and honest life.

THE first of the evil effects of a life of sensual pleasures, is the love of money, which is the root of all evil. It is the love of money, which is the cause of all our misery and sorrow, and which is the cause of all our sin. It is the love of money, which is the cause of all our misery and sorrow, and which is the cause of all our sin. It is the love of money, which is the cause of all our misery and sorrow, and which is the cause of all our sin. It is the love of money, which is the cause of all our misery and sorrow, and which is the cause of all our sin.

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The EVIL EFFECTS of a LIFE of SENSUAL PLEASURE.

I TIMOTHY v. 6.

But she that liveth in pleasure, is dead while she liveth.

THE desire of happiness is implanted in the mind of every rational being. Happiness is the ultimate end for which we were created, both with regard to God and to ourselves. For we cannot conceive that the Supreme Mind had any other designs in view, than the welfare of his intelligent offspring, when he brought them into existence; and as to ourselves, we must know, and feel, that felicity is what we aim at, in all the objects we pursue. It may, therefore, be deemed a matter of surprize, that we so frequently make choice of objects, which bring along with them a large portion of evil and misery. But this pro-

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ceeds from our mistaken apprehensions, and our false imaginations, concerning the nature of real good. True happiness undoubtedly arises from the attainments and virtues of the soul : it arises from divine knowledge ; from the piety, purity, and benevolence of our dispositions ; from our conformity to the image of our Maker ; and from our title to his approbation and favour. Nevertheless, the children of men seek for it elsewhere ; they seek for it among inferior objects ; they seek for it in objects that are often fatal to their welfare, both here and hereafter. Allured by some present enjoyment, they consider not their best interest ; they do not reflect on the tendencies and consequences of their actions ; but, for the sake of sensual indulgences, strike into the paths of folly and ruin. Even while they are surrounded by their pleasures, they are in the most wretched condition. They defeat the grand purposes of their being ; are lost to whatever is noble and excellent ; and draw upon themselves swift destruction : so that, in the emphatical language of the apostle, they “ are “ dead while they live.”

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In treating upon the text, I shall, first, briefly consider what St. Paul understands by living in pleasure; and, secondly, shew in what sense such as live in pleasure may be said to be dead while they live.

I am, first, briefly to consider what is here understood, by living in pleasure. The character which the apostle describes, is evidently a very bad one; and, therefore, he could not intend by it, entirely to condemn the participation of delight from present gratifications. The wise Solomon hath observed, "there is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour*." St. Paul himself hath, also, told us, in the same epistle to Timothy from which the text is taken, in the fourth chapter, and the fourth verse, that "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." As our heavenly Father designed us for a more substantial, elevated, and durable felicity, than what this world can afford, so, while we continue inhabitants

* Ecclesiastes ii. 24.

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below, he doth not forbid us to take some satisfaction in temporal objects, provided we use them with prudence and moderation.

For what cause do we imagine it is, that the Supreme Artificer of the universe hath rendered the earth so beauteous and charming a scene? Why hath he stored it, not merely with the necessities of existence, but with every thing, likewise, that is agreeable and elegant? Why hath he spread around us, whatever can regale the senses? Why hath he given such various relishes to our food? Why hath he commanded such fragrances to strike upon the smell? Why hath he entertained the ear with such melody, and harmony of sounds? Why hath he ravished our eyes with such extensive, lovely, and diversified prospects? Why, also, hath he implanted within us, faculties and appetites that are fitted to the enjoyment of the good things with which the world is furnished? Why hath he done this, but that the blessings of his bounty should be thankfully and temperately used; and that the desires he hath bestowed upon

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us, should be gratified, within the limits of reason and religion?

The living in pleasure, mentioned by the apostle, is not the innocent delight which we may lawfully take in the favours of creation and providence; but such an attachment to present and sensible objects, as is inconsistent with our duty, and induces us to make them our principal pursuit. The persons who come under the description of the text are, all who so indulge to the, otherwise, harmless gratifications of the world, as to neglect their moral improvement, and their eternal interests; and, especially, all who give a loose to their vicious passions. The character here set before us, by St. Paul, may be applied to every one, who forgets the important purposes for which he was created; disregards his obligations to God and man, and follows the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season. It includes those who wholly, or chiefly, seek after the vanities of sense, and make provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts. In short, it comprises such as subject themselves to a vicious luxury and excess; such

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as hunt after sensual joy; such as spend that time, and those talents in an indulgence of their meaner appetites, which ought to be employed in the service of their Maker, in doing good to their brethren of mankind, and in procuring substantial and everlasting benefit to their own souls. Those who are engaged in this unworthy, irrational, and unchristian course of action, are the persons described by St. Paul, in the text. And that their case is very dishonourable and deplorable, will appear, while we shew,

Secondly, the truth of the apostle's assertion, that such as live in pleasure, are dead while they live. It is here scarcely necessary to remind you, that the word *dead* is used in a figurative sense. It is an elegant and forcible metaphor, which signifies that those who are devoted to present gratifications, act contrary to the nature given them by God, and to the end for which he placed them in the world. Life is not measured by mere existence; it doth not consist in walking upon the earth, and viewing the sun; but in answering the valuable designs of our being. Of those alone it deserves to be said, that

that they LIVE, who, by the cultivation of universal piety and goodness, behave suitably to their situation here, and their hopes hereafter: whereas an immoderate and vicious attachment to sensible objects, is destructive of all the desirable purposes of our creation, both with regard to our present and our eternal state. The declaration, therefore, of the text, may be considered, in general, as expressing the evil consequences of sensual pleasure. Its consequences are, indeed, terrible in the highest degree; for it unfits us for the discharge of our proper duties; has the worst influence on our bodily and temporal welfare; enfeebles the powers and destroys the peace of the mind; and, at length, ends in its total ruin.

By living in pleasure, we are incapacitated for the discharge of our proper duties. This is so extremely obvious, and is rendered evident by such numerous and striking instances, that we cannot doubt of the fact. The slaves to their passions leave little or no room for reflection or rational employment. Their whole attention is engrossed
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by their baser appetites, and their meaner indulgences; so that they do not think of complying with the important obligations of devotion and virtue; or, if they do sometimes think of these things, they cannot find either time or inclination to act in a right manner. Hence they become alike negligent of what they ought to perform, with respect to themselves, their country, or the cause of religion.

Do we not see vast numbers, who are so devoted to some present gratifications, as to disregard the essential duties of their private station and character in life? Do we not see vast numbers, who, for the sake of the most contemptible pleasures, forsake the business of their several callings, and take no care about their domestic concerns? Do we not behold them disqualifying themselves for the discharge of the social relations in which they stand to their neighbours, their kindred, their children, and their comforts? Hence it is that they execute no offices of humanity to their acquaintance, no works of love to their friends, and no acts of kindness to such as are connected with them

them by the ties of blood. Hence it is that husbands and wives forget the obligations of œconomy, fidelity, and tenderness. Hence it is that they totally neglect, and even become unfit for the education of their offspring; so that their little ones are left a prey to ignorance and vice, a prey to every rising passion and every dangerous habit.

The persons who are given up to sensuality are equally unable to perform the services they owe to their country. They will be insensible when it is exposed to perils, thoughtless about its defence, and incapable of doing what is incumbent upon them for its preservation and security. Of this, Belshazzar, whose story is recorded in the book of Daniel, was a remarkable instance. At the time in which Babylon, his principal city, was besieged by Cyaxares (or Darius the Mede, as he is called in scripture) and by Cyrus, *be*, with his thousand lords, indulged to feasting, revelling, and intemperance. Unmindful of the active and formidable enemy that surrounded his capital, and threatened it with destruction, the monarch

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monarch and his nobility were dissolved in wine and jollity; and added impiety to debauchery, by wantonly profaning the vessels of the temple. And what was the consequence of this dissipation and riot? The consequence was, that Cyrus took advantage of the disordered scene, entered the city by stratagem, seized the palace, and "in that night was Belshazzar, the king of "the Chaldeans, slain*."

History will set before us a number of facts, which shew that men devoted to their appetites and vices have, when called to the service of the public, brought disgrace and ruin to themselves, and dishonour to the community to which they belonged.

The same indolence and incapacity will be found in persons of this character, when the important interests of religion are concerned. Every great and generous design, by which the honour of God may be promoted, and the sacred cause of truth and righteousness advanced, will be neglected by them; or, if they should be engaged in

* Daniel v. 30.

any such scheme, their evil affections will induce them to abandon it, or disqualify them for executing it in a right manner.

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What has been said will suffice to make us plainly perceive that, by living in pleasure, we are unfitted for the discharge of our proper duties. Such a course of action is also not merely an omission of what we ought to perform, but is attended with positive misery; for the living in pleasure has the worst effect on our corporal and temporal welfare. With regard to the body itself, we need not enlarge to prove that an indulgence to sensuality, in its higher degrees, doth almost unavoidably destroy the constitution. We need not lead you into the chamber of the debauchee, shew him on the bed of sickness, or point out the pains and agonies he often suffers in consequence of his unlawful gratifications. Instances of the extreme folly of vice, in this respect, occur on every side. Do we not frequently see those who, by their intemperance, have given up the most robust frame a prey to diseases, have broken down its strength, and brought it to an untimely

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grave? Where an undue love for pleasure is not accompanied with such violent excesses, or followed by such speedy destruction, it is, nevertheless, in many cases, exceedingly pernicious to health. A general course of dissipation, a succession of vain and unprofitable diversions, and late hours, will gradually take away the bloom, introduce a languor of spirits, and contribute both to embitter and shorten our remaining days.

An attachment to our sensual appetites will have the same bad influence on our temporal concerns in general, that it hath on the body in particular. When this attachment prevails in a very great degree, it quickly embarrasses the most abundant wealth, and dissolves the largest estates. Numerous are the examples of persons who, by indulging to all their mad desires, have sunk from the most affluent fortunes to the deepest poverty, and have been reduced to the most abject condition; a condition made up of meanness, penury, and contempt. With respect to others, though they may not run into the same excess of riot, yet they

they often damage their affairs by a course of expensive vanity. They become involved in perplexities, from which they cannot be extricated without much difficulty. This unhappy propensity to pleasure is peculiarly fatal in its effects, with respect to lower or middle life, with respect to such as are engaged in trade, or depend only upon moderate incomes. By leading them into gratifications which their circumstances will not afford, it makes them hurt their families, injure their creditors, and fall into disgrace and wretchedness.

As this disposition is thus fatal to our corporal and worldly interests, so likewise it weakens and depraves the mind, and robs it of its most rational and manly enjoyments. Every passion that prevails in an undue degree, breaks in upon the natural order of the mental frame, and gradually debilitates its powers. But none doth this more eminently than the love of pleasure. The love of sensual pleasure draws off the attention from noble pursuits to mean ones, and prevents all the generous and sublime efforts of the soul. It is alike pernicious to the

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attainment of science and virtue. That it is an enemy to the progress of knowledge, might be proved by many considerations, and by many examples; but it is more important to reflect, that it is an enemy to the graces of the heart. It is an encouragement to vice; it is vice itself; and opposite to every amiable and laudable qualification. It hinders the exercise of love to God, and obstructs the ardent breathings of our affections towards celestial objects. It deprives us of that time which ought to be employed in obtaining an acquaintance with our Maker and ourselves, our duties and our expectations; and hence it is the cause of self-ignorance, an ignorance of all others the most dishonourable, and the most destructive in its consequences. It is a narrow, base disposition, which entirely confines our thoughts to the indulgence of our own brutal appetites, and is hurtful to every benevolent and elevated design. Thus does the love of sensual pleasure evidently weaken and deprave the mind.

It doth, likewise, bring upon us positive anguish and misery. It robs us of the rational

tional and manly enjoyments that spring from the consciousness of having discharged our duty, from the sense of having maintained our proper dignity, and from the reflection that we are interested in the divine favour; and adds the anxiety and torment of having acted contrary to every worthy view; contrary to our real perfection, and to our eternal happiness. There is a feeling of good and evil implanted in the soul, a principle of conscience that we cannot wholly root out. If we disregard the laws of our Creator, and plunge into irregular gratifications, the condemnation of our own hearts will attend us, in spite of all our attempts to stifle it; and we shall be wretched in the midst of our pretended mirth and jollity. None of our amusements, none of our arts, will be able to prevent our secret abomination of ourselves, and our inward disgust and dissatisfaction at the vile course of action in which we are engaged.

But besides this general disapprobation that accompanies a vicious conduct, there is also an apprehension of the indignation of

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the Deity, and a fear of future punishment, that will fix daggers in the breast. We have the strongest assurances, both from reason and revelation, that tribulation and wrath shall be the portion of the transgressors; and the persuasion of this awful truth, will often, in the present life, fill the wicked with unspeakable terror. Were you to see the once gay debauchee, in the hour of sickness, or at the approach of death, you would behold a dismal scene indeed! His diversions, his companions, his sensual pleasures, have now forsaken him, and the reflection upon them is exceedingly painful. His body is reduced to a state of weakness, and his mind hath no topics of consolation; but, on the contrary, is goaded by anguish and despair. An awakened conscience, and an offended God, stare him in the face; and he would, joyfully, give a thousand worlds, if he had them in his power, that his day of trial might be lengthened. Look at such an object as this, all ye who are ready to be drawn aside by every allurement; and be persuaded to imbibe a lesson of sacred wisdom, before it be too late; before you arrive at the same deplorable situation.

Once more; the living in pleasure will, at last, be succeeded by our future and final ruin. The present horror of vice is not all the punishment with which it is attended. If it be persisted in, without repentance and reformation, it will be actually followed by all the miseries it forebodes, and with which it is threatened in holy writ. There is a second death, infinitely more dreadful than the first; and to this death, such as are the slaves of their irregular lusts and passions are liable. They are dead while they live; dead in the eye of the divine law, as they stand exposed to that everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power, which is denounced against the servants of sin. If they continue in wilful disobedience to the precepts of the gospel, and a determined attachment to their sensual appetites, they will be summoned to appear, with unutterable terror, before the divine tribunal. Their secret and open crimes will be, alike, set before them, with all their circumstances of aggravation. They will be unable to answer to the awful charge that is exhibited against them; and the righte-

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ous Judge shall pronounce upon them a sentence of condemnation. "Rejoice, now, "O young man, in thy youth, and let thy "heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, "and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in "the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, "that for all these things God will bring thee "into judgment." Attend to these alarming truths, ye that are devoted to pleasure, and consider the effects of your unlawful gratifications. What are the mighty things that you will gain, by a life of vanity, dissipation, and riot? Why you will gain disorder of body, distress in your temporal interests, depravity and anxiety of soul in the present world, and the terrors of that which is to come. Dreadful acquisitions indeed! Acquisitions at the thoughts of which we should tremble.

Let us, therefore, improve what hath been said, by forming a sincere and steady resolution against the allurements of vicious indulgences. This, one should think, we should each of us be ready to do, from the representation that hath been given of their fatal consequences. Surely we need only
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look on sensual pleasure to be inspired with detestation: we need only survey the prodigious evils in her train, to be induced to flee from her with the utmost earnestness! How many thousands have fallen by her strong hand! What numerous trophies of her victories have been erected in every age, and in every part of the world! The young, the old, the brave, the rich, the honourable, have become a prey to her attacks. Persons of the noblest genius, of the finest attainments, of the most amiable dispositions; those who promised to be the glory and the delight of mankind, have been plunged into destruction, by her conquering arm. Let us learn from their example, to be more vigilant against her attempts; and let us resolve, not in our own strength, but in the strength of the Supreme Mind, that we will not yield to this dangerous enemy. Supported by the motives of the gospel, let us maintain our guard against every seducing temptation, and every subtle artifice that would draw us from the path of our duty. Let us, this day, renew our purposes that we will adhere to the service of our Maker, and

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and the interests of religion and virtue. If the past part of our lives hath been spent in a wise and worthy manner, it is well; let us enjoy the satisfaction of it; and let us go on, with increasing ardour, in the good paths we have chosen. But if it hath been spent in dissipation, vanity, and debauchery, let our faces be covered with shame, and our hearts be touched with genuine repentance; and let us determine that our approaching days shall be better employed, and carry a happier account to heaven.

With this view, let us consider the precariousness of our condition below. We know not whether a longer or a shorter space is allotted us for the future. Our existence may, in several respects, be compared to a tale that is told; and it is, often, as speedily at an end. Be exhorted, therefore, O young ones, to reflect upon, and flee from, the dangers that surround you, now, while the opportunity is afforded, and the season of religious improvement is present. You are at an age in which sensual pleasure courts your acceptance, and endeavours to put on a very engaging dress.

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But let me beseech you not to be ensnared by the flattering appearances she assumes. Be watchful against her seducing arts, call to mind her inward deformity; and paint to your imaginations the deplorable calamities that follow her steps. Seek to the Supreme Being, for the aids of his good Spirit; and avoid, as much as possible, the occasions of evil.

One method of preserving us from the allurements of vice, will be to pursue, with unshaken diligence, the business of our respective callings; for idleness is a great inlet to temptation. And as to those who are trained up to no particular profession, they need not let their time lie heavy on their hands; they need not become the slaves of indolence, or the dupes of their appetites, while there is so much useful knowledge to be obtained, so many valuable designs to be forwarded, such numbers of their fellow-creatures to be relieved.

Above all, let us aspire to more refined and elevated delights than this inferior state can administer. I do not invite you, my friends, to lead a gloomy and melancholy life;

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life; I do not ask you to give up any solid enjoyment; but would persuade you to embrace true and lasting pleasure. But where is this true and lasting pleasure to be found? Not, you may be assured, in sensual indulgences; nor entirely in the innocent gratifications of the world; but in the approbation of God, in the blessings which the Saviour hath revealed and communicated, in devotion, integrity, purity, and benevolence. These are things that will never pall; these will survive the wreck of nature, and will constitute our perfection and bliss in the regions of eternity. There may be difficulties in religion; but the more you advance in a heavenly temper, the easier will be your progress, and the higher satisfaction will be found in the ways of goodness. Fix your hearts, then, upon moral attainments, and upon those everlasting mansions where real felicity hath taken up her habitation. And may these considerations have such an effect upon you, as to engage you to pursue your highest dignity and glory! Thus may you be happy not only for a few transitory years, but unspeakably happy

with that infinitely perfect Being, in whose
presence there is fulness of joy, and at
whose right hand there are rivers of plea-
sure for evermore. Amen.

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S E R M O N XIV.

The BENEFIT and REWARD of
AFFLICTIONS.

2 CORINTHIANS iv. 17.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

WERE we to consult the natural dictates and feelings of the human heart, it would appear very desirable always to exist in a state of ease and pleasure. Pain and sorrow are in themselves extremely harsh and disagreeable; they are objects which the constitution of our minds obliges us to shrink from, and to avoid, as much as we are able. But, however delightful it might seem to enjoy a perpetual freedom from anxiety and distress, yet, if we attentively consider the matter, it will be found that
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such a privilege would not, upon the whole, redound to our benefit, even with regard to the present life. A character cannot, in this world, be formed to any thing eminent or valuable, unless it hath, in some degree or other, been exposed to hardships and difficulties. From hardships and difficulties we derive an experience and a steadiness, which give us to act with propriety and success in the stations wherein Providence hath placed us. From hardships and difficulties our minds acquire a strength they would not otherwise have had, and learn to exert their powers to the utmost. Nay, hardships and difficulties sometimes produce abilities and virtues which, if they had not, by these means, been called into action, would never have existed in the soul. Accordingly, shall we not find that the greatest men, whether in a private or a public situation, have been such as were educated in the school of affliction? Might not the most useful and the most illustrious persons have proved altogether insignificant, or, perhaps, hurtful in society, if their vices had not been corrected, their dispositions improved,

proved, and their genius roused, by severe trials ?

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Thus, if calamities were only beneficial with relation to the present life, it is evident that they would constitute a wise part of the divine plan, in the administration of the world. But they are beneficial in a still nobler view; as they are calculated to prepare us for our future being, and to increase our reward in the regions of eternal happiness.

Granting, however, that the advantages which flow from the distresses of mortality are both numerous and mighty; it must, notwithstanding, be confessed, that, while we labour under these distresses, it is no easy task to bear them with fortitude. At such a season, we are generally so much absorbed in our grief, that we cannot perceive the benevolent tendency of our afflictions; or, if we do acknowledge this tendency, it is not felt by us in a manner sufficiently forcible and practical. Hence it hath, in all ages, been the hardest attainment to furnish considerations which could effectually arm the breast of man with courage, in a period

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of adversity. This seems to have been the grand thing which the heathen philosophers strove to effect, though with little success. The utmost *they* could produce, and *that* in a very few minds, was a kind of stubborn patience: but to make their followers regard the evils of life as blessings, and rejoice in them as testimonies of the parental kindness of God, was out of their power. An acquisition so arduous, important, and sublime, was reserved for the gospel alone; and even Christians themselves, who are acquainted with the supports of their holy religion, cannot avoid being astonished at the language of St. Paul in the text. They cannot avoid being astonished that he should speak so slightly, I had almost said contemptuously, of his calamities, when they reflect upon the circumstances he was in at that time. It appears, from some preceding verses, that he was *then* exposed to severe persecution; and that he expected the most cruel treatment from the rage and malice of his enemies; notwithstanding which, he esteemed his sufferings as trifling, as nothing, when he took a survey of the consolations

solations he enjoyed, and the endless felicity that would be the consequence of his trials.

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“ For our light affliction, which is but for
“ a moment, worketh out for us a far more
“ exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

These words have, without doubt, an especial reference to the particular case of the apostles; but the doctrine contained in them is applicable, likewise, to all the faithful servants of Jesus. I shall, therefore, endeavour to shew, in general,

First, in what sense the distresses of life may be represented as inconsiderable. And,

Secondly, point out in what respects they have a tendency to promote our everlasting happiness.—I am, first, to shew in what sense the distresses of life may be represented as inconsiderable. The original language of the text is remarkably emphatical, in expressing the lightness of affliction. Affliction is implied to be levity itself; something so insignificant in its nature, and which so speedily passes away, that it is scarcely worthy to be mentioned. Now it cannot here be the meaning of St. Paul, that the troubles of mortality, in themselves, and

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separately considered, have little or nothing in them that is disagreeable or dreadful. We all know, by observation upon the state of the world, and by our own experience, that they are very grievous to flesh and blood. Do not sickness and pains of body deaden the beauties of the creation, throw a damp on every enjoyment, and bring us into circumstances of positive anguish and misery? Do not great losses, with regard to temporal substance, or a situation of deep poverty, expose mankind to hardships and calamities that are difficult to be borne? Doth not the death of near and affectionate relatives make a severe wound in a tender heart, and fill it, a long time, with bitterness of woe? These evils, when they come alone, will often fall with great weight: how terrible, then, must they be when they are united together! When several burthens press, at once, upon the mind; when it is, at the same period, subjected to illness, to want, and to the deprivation of its best friends, and sweetest earthly consolations, must not its condition be extremely deplorable; and can it be wondered at that,
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in such a case, it is almost overwhelmed with sorrow? Add to this, that the distresses we meet with are often tedious, as well as sharp. Some of them continue a long time before they are removed, and others of them are of such a kind that they cannot entirely be taken away.

It is evident, therefore, that it could by no means be the intention of the apostle to assert that afflictions, in themselves, and separately considered, are light and trifling. That he was sensible of the contrary, is plain from the manner in which he speaks of them in other passages of the New Testament. Thus he expressly declares, Heb. xii. 11. "that no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous;" and makes mention, in the chapter where the text lies, of his own situation, as troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted, and cast down.

The design of St. Paul is to assert that the calamities we endure are inconsiderable in a comparative view; and, in this view, his assertion will be found strictly just and reasonable. The evils we are surrounded

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with are, for instance, light, when considered in connection with the mercies we have received from the hands of our almighty and benevolent Creator. They may, also, be said to be light, when compared with our desert. These two thoughts are undoubtedly true, and justly call for our frequent and thankful meditation: but I shall not insist upon them at present, because they are not the particular thoughts intended by the apostle. His meaning evidently is, that our afflictions are light, when compared with the greatness and the duration of the future blessedness.

Our afflictions are light, when compared with the greatness of the future bliss. That it is a bliss immense and magnificent beyond all description and idea, is declared in the text with a strength uncommonly remarkable, and which no words can translate. The original implies, that were we to speak of the heavenly state in the most forcible expressions, were we to add hyperbole to hyperbole in our representation of it, we should still fall infinitely short of its real dignity. Agreeably to this, we are taught,
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in another passage of the New Testament, "that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*." The amplitude of the reward bears no proportion to our present sufferings; but exceeds them in a degree which we should in vain attempt to describe. Were our calamities as numerous and heavy as could meet together in a single object, they would not merit to be once named, when the joys of the celestial regions are in question. Might we not as reasonably assert that a drop of water is equal in bulk to the ocean, or a grain of sand to the whole earth, as assert that the evils of this world are equal to that far more exceeding weight of glory which awaits the persevering disciples of Jesus at the day of judgment?

Again, our distresses are light, when compared with the duration of the future blessedness. In this view, St. Paul declares that they are but for a moment; a singular manner of speaking! since it is known that our troubles are often protracted through a

* 1 Corinthians ii. 9.

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course of years: but yet it is a manner of speaking which is extremely proper. Well may the sorrows we meet with be described as only for a moment, when they are considered in connection with that endless felicity by which they are succeeded! For what proportion is there between this life and eternity? Proportion did I say? It is absurd to make use of the term. No resemblance can be formed between objects so infinitely different. Were our afflictions much longer than they are; did they last through the whole period of our habitation below; nay, did they continue through successive ages; still, in a comparative light, they would not deserve to be mentioned with an everlasting crown. An everlasting crown of compleat honour and happiness so diminishes the sharpest sufferings, that they almost seem to disappear, and to be totally struck out of the book of existence.

I now proceed, secondly, to point out in what respects the calamities of life have a tendency to promote our eternal welfare. And here it may be observed, that they are calculated to bring those persons to the practice of religion who had formerly been thoughtless

thoughtless about so important a concern. Though the mercies of God ought universally to lead us to gratitude and obedience; though they furnish the most abundant and the most engaging motives to love, adore, and serve him; yet, such is the degeneracy of which the human mind is capable, that they are frequently perverted to contrary purposes. It is evident, from fact, that prosperity is harder to bear than adversity. Prosperity is apt to produce a certain giddiness, which renders us forgetful of our dependance upon our Maker, and the allegiance we owe him as our Sovereign and Benefactor. The Supreme Being, therefore, from the same principle of goodness which causes him to pour his copious blessings upon us, permits us to fall into distress; that, by the frowns of his providence, we may be impelled to that pious temper which we would not be excited to by its favours. Such is the design of our heavenly Father in visiting us with afflictions; and must it not be acknowledged that afflictions are well suited to answer so valuable an end? Is it not manifest that they tend to set the
insufficiency

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insufficiency of the present world before us, in a very striking light? Do they not make us to feel that our expectations of a solid felicity on this side the grave are absolutely groundless? And is not this a proper disposition for directing our views to those better things which are liable to no disappointment? The evils of life, by demonstrating the vanity of all our temporal prospects, dissipate the thoughtlessness that had taken possession of our souls, and introduce a sober turn of sentiment. When we are brought to this turn of sentiment, we naturally enquire what hath been our conduct towards God, and what are his intentions in the troubles he sends. Hence we begin to see the ungratefulness of our behaviour to the Almighty; the heinous nature of vice; and the necessity of obtaining superior joys to what earth can afford, even the joys of eternity.

Such is the way in which the calamities we are exposed to are calculated to operate; and in this way have they not actually operated, in a variety of instances? Have not great numbers, who had forgotten their

duty in the day of prosperity, considered it in the day of adversity, so as to become wise unto salvation? Hath not some severe stroke of Providence engaged them, in earnest, to seek after their Maker? and have they not had the highest reason to be thankful for the distress which occasioned so happy a change in their moral and spiritual condition?

That these observations are perfectly agreeable to the doctrine of scripture, is apparent from several passages. Thus we read that Manasseh, the king of the Jews, when he was in affliction, "besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers." 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12. Thus the prophet Isaiah tells us, Ch. xxvii. 9, that by being "smitten, the iniquity of Jacob was to be purged;" and that this would be all the fruit, "to take away his sin." Jeremiah, likewise, hath recorded, that Ephraim by chastisement was humbled and instructed.

Farther, the troubles of life have a tendency to correct the coldness and the failings of those who, in the main, are already truly

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truly religious. Such is the weakness, and such is the imperfection, of our nature, that even the sincerely good are continually liable to act wrong. The sincerely good have their neglects and deficiencies; and sometimes, through inadvertency, surprize, and sudden temptation, they fall into very considerable faults. Nay, doth it not too frequently happen, that a certain degree of languor and indifference seizes upon persons who are not destitute of real piety; so that they shall seem rather to go backwards than forwards in the prosecution of their immortal concerns? Now, what is to be done in a case so deplorable as this? Can we suppose that the Almighty will utterly forsake his genuine though backsliding servants; that he will leave them to their own folly; and let them advance on to their final ruin? No, he takes a much kinder method with them; and inflicts upon them some heavy calamity, that they may turn back from the error of their ways, look into their own breasts, remember whence they are fallen, repent, and do their first works. Thus the royal psalmist hath observed, “ It is good
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“ for me that I have been afflicted ; that I
“ might learn thy statutes.” And again,
“ Before I was afflicted I went astray ; but
“ now have I kept thy word *.”

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Once more, the evils of life are useful with regard to the very best of men, as tending to increase the virtues they already possess, and to call graces into exercise which would not, otherwise, have appeared. The troubles we meet with are by no means to be usually considered as chastisements for particular defects. As a state of probation implies difficulty, a course of suffering may, for what we know to the contrary, be necessary even for innocent beings, in a certain period of their existence, till they are thoroughly established in proper dispositions. But be this as it may, it cannot be doubted but that the most eminently pious among the sons of Adam, those who have approached the nearest to the christian standard, those who are the freest from failings, will receive abundant benefit from the calamities they endure. Hence that love to the great Parent of the universe, that indif-

* Psalm cxix. 71. 67.

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ference to the present scene of things, and those other branches of a holy temper which have heretofore flourished within them, may take deeper root in their souls, and produce richer and more valuable fruits.

Besides, there are some attainments which can only appear in the shade of affliction; and, at the same time, they are attainments peculiarly beautiful and useful; attainments which throw the finest lustre on the persons who are so happy as to be possessed of them. These are patience under the sharpest trials, submission to the will of God, acquiescence with his darkest dispensations, superiority to the terrors of the world, a chearful confidence in the wisdom and benevolence of the divine proceedings, and, to complete the whole, a glorying in tribulation. These are graces which exalt the character of a good man to the highest degree of splendour, and throw a majesty around him, which he could not possibly have appeared in, had his days glided on in the smooth current of an uninterrupted prosperity. These are graces which the season of distress alone can enable us to exhibit; and these

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are graces which peculiarly qualify us for a distinguished crown of honour and felicity in the heavenly mansions.

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Thus we have seen in what respects the evils of life are calculated to promote our everlasting happiness. And is it not evident, from what hath been said, that the apostle hath spoken the language of reason and truth, in asserting that our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? Have not all the sufferings we endure a plain and obvious tendency to train us up for immortality, and to raise us to nobler and sublimer measures of blessedness than we could otherwise have reached?

But let it be remembered that the future reward infinitely surpasses the best improvements we can make of our troubles. It is in virtue of a positive appointment, proceeding from the free and boundless compassion of God, that our inconsiderable and temporary sorrows are succeeded by such solid, durable, and unutterable joys. We could not possibly merit so vast a recompence, but
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are intirely indebted for it to the riches of the divine benevolence. It is the mercy of our heavenly Father that calls us to trials, and, when we have behaved well under them, dignifies our patience and our fortitude with honours and blessings utterly beyond our expectations and conceptions.

And now, by way of application, let us admire the wisdom, and praise the goodness, of the Supreme Being, in appointing that the human race shall be subject to afflictions. We have seen that our meeting with difficulties is a valuable part of the plan of Providence with relation to this world, and can we doubt that it is an equally valuable part of the plan of Providence with relation to the world to come, when we consider the excellent advantages which result from our calamities? Indeed, were all events to go on as smoothly and pleasurably as we could naturally wish, we should never rise to any greatness of character; and our affections would be so glued to this terrestrial scene, that we should desire to continue eternally upon it.

That constitution of things, by which we
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are ordained to partake of pain and distress, is as kind as it is wise. No one, surely, can dispute the matter, who perceives that the design of God, in visiting us with evil, is to draw us to himself; to amend our dispositions, to advance our true worth and dignity, and to make us shine as stars in the firmament for ever and ever. Doth it require any words to prove that these are purposes the most gracious and merciful which can possibly be formed? Let us, then, adore our Maker for his admirable conduct; and praise his benevolence in so ordering the scheme of the universe, that our sowing in tears shall be the cause of our reaping an harvest of unspeakable and endless joy.

Again, since affliction is appointed to be our portion below, what a high value should we set upon Christianity, which furnishes the divinest supports under all our troubles! If we would behold, in a striking view, the excellence of the gospel in this respect, let us look to St. Paul and his fellow apostles. They were exposed to such ignominy, such reproaches, such necessities, such hardships,

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such persecutions as few of the sons of men have endured ; and yet how nobly did they triumph over them ! How elevated is the language with which they speak of their sufferings ! With what tranquillity, resignation, and courage did they bear the malice of their enemies ! Nay, what rapture did they express under the severest trials, because they were accounted worthy to partake of contempt and pain in the cause of their great Master ! Must not *that* be certainly a most valuable institution which could produce such illustrious effects ? Indeed, the more we reflect on the nature and contents of our holy religion, the more we shall admire its usefulness in the season of adversity ; the more we shall be sensible of its prodigious superiority to all the systems of philosophy which have laboured to alleviate the calamities of life, and to steel the human breast with magnanimity and fortitude. If, therefore, we desire substantial comfort amidst complicated distresses, let us highly prize, and steadily adhere to, the Christian hope. There let us fix, and then we need not be terrified at

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rising billows, and at threatening storms; for we shall be established upon a rock, against which the waves shall beat, and the tempests rage in vain.

This being the case, let not those be greatly dejected who labour under affliction. Some are apt to imagine, when troubles fall upon them, that they are forsaken by God, and are ready to call in question their interest in his approbation and favour. But if they have been heretofore devoted to his service, what can be more unreasonable than such a surmise? From the whole tenor of scripture it appears that our severest sufferings are often the result of the peculiar affection of our Maker, and that they are always intended for the benefit of the persons upon whom they are inflicted. This point is particularly argued by the apostle, in the 12th chapter to the Hebrews, from the 5th to the 12th verse; and I hope you will hear the passage with pleasure and improvement. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and

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“ scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.
 “ If ye endure chastening, God dealeth
 “ with you as with sons ; for what son is
 “ he whom the Father chasteneth not ?
 “ But if ye be without chastisement, where-
 “ of all are partakers, then are ye bastards,
 “ and not sons. Furthermore, we have
 “ had fathers of our flesh, which corrected
 “ us, and we gave them reverence ; shall
 “ we not much rather be in subjection
 “ unto the Father of Spirits, and live ? For
 “ they verily for a few days chastened us
 “ after their own pleasure ; but he for our
 “ profit, that we might be partakers of his
 “ holiness. Now no chastening for the pre-
 “ sent seemeth to be joyous, but grievous ;
 “ nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the
 “ peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them
 “ which are exercised thereby.” Is it not
 apparent, from all this, that it would be
 criminal to dispute the divine goodness in
 its afflictive dispensations ?

You expect, perhaps, my friends, that in
 a period of distress we should do nothing
 but condole with you, on account of your
 unhappy situation. It is, indeed, our duty
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to sympathize with the sorrows you feel; but there is another thing incumbent upon us, which probably you little think of, and that is, to congratulate you on account of God's taking such care of your interests; on account of his having such benevolent designs in your favour. Yes, we ought to congratulate you that your heavenly Parent is so desirous of your happiness as to call you to the endurance of sufferings, that he may have an opportunity of increasing your crown of glory. Instead, therefore, of being dejected, doth it not behove you, under every calamity, to exert a chearful trust in his conduct, and to rest satisfied that his ways are mercy and goodness?

Lastly, let us be solicitous to make the right improvement of afflictions. All that we have said concerning their beneficial tendency goes entirely upon this supposition. Unless we convert them to the uses for which they were given, in no respect shall we be the better for them, either in the present or the future world. A man may be miserable here, and miserable hereafter, if he is destitute of that principle of piety

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which alone can sanctify the evils of life, and change them into blessings. Is it not, indeed, a wretched condition, to be surrounded with troubles, and yet to receive no advantage from them with respect to our everlasting felicity? Such, however, is the condition of great numbers. Yes, there are great numbers who are loaded with distress, while, at the same time, instead of looking up to their Maker, and profiting by the awful visitations of his providence, they grow more hardened in iniquity. Is it possible for imagination to picture a situation equally deplorable and dreadful? A situation so deplorable and dreadful let us earnestly study to avoid. Let us be careful to turn the divine dispensations to the valuable ends they are calculated to answer. And may God enable us to do this in so effectual a manner, that our light affliction, which is but for a moment, may work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! Amen.

SERMON

S E R M O N X V.

The ADVANTAGES and DISADVANTAGES
of living to OLD AGE considered.

J O B xlii. 16.

*After this lived Job an hundred and forty
years, and saw his sons, and his sons sons,
even four generations.*

THAT devout addressies should be offered to God for the blessings of every kind that are necessary for us, hath been evinced again and again by a variety of arguments, drawn both from reason and revelation. But the wise and judicious have, in all ages, established a difference between the manner in which we should ask for the mercies that are temporal and the mercies that are spiritual. With respect to spiritual attainments and benefits, it is allowed that we cannot be too solicitous in our desires to obtain them. It is allowed that we

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may, nay, that we ought, with a holy boldness and importunity, to petition expressly for high degrees of wisdom, virtue, and celestial perfection. But the case is otherwise where temporal advantages are concerned; because it is impossible for us to know how far any present enjoyment may tend, upon the whole, to our real welfare. For this reason, we should be cautious of descending to the mention of particular circumstances; and when we actually proceed so far, it should be done with the profoundest modesty and humility, and with an absolute resignation to the divine will. Very rational was the conduct of an ancient sage, who desired the Supreme Being to give him what was good for him, whether he asked it or not; and to withhold from him what was evil, even though he should pray for it. It is also worthy of observation, that the model of prayer which our Saviour has left us, doth only authorize us, with regard to this world, to beg, in general, for daily subsistence.

How little we are capable of judging what is best for us, with relation to inferior blessings,

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blessings, is evident from the history of Job. When accumulated distresses had fallen upon him, we find that he pathetically describes the happiness of the dead, and expresses his strongest wishes that himself might become an inhabitant of the grave. But though the weight of his afflictions made his dissolution, at that time, appear so desirable; yet the event shewed that he erred in his judgment, and was blameable in his practice, when he so ardently requested that God would destroy him. For the troubles that surrounded him were afterwards removed, and the Almighty was pleased to shed upon him a profusion of prosperity. Among other particulars, the length of his life was an additional circumstance in his felicity. To represent this, is the view with which it is mentioned in the text; and hence I shall take occasion to give a discourse upon old age. Since, however, the case of Job is only a single instance; and that too of an extraordinary nature; I shall not immediately be led from it to draw an absolute conclusion in favour of continuing

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continuing many years upon the earth; but shall endeavour to state,

First, the advantages that may attend upon old age.

Secondly, the disadvantages to which it may be exposed. And then conclude the whole with some remarks.

I am, first, to state the advantages that may attend upon old age. Besides the favourable aspect which the text seems to have on this side of the question, it may be observed, that in the early periods of the world, long life was universally looked upon as a mighty blessing; and a sudden or immature death was considered as a peculiar mark of the divine indignation. "That your days may be multiplied," we find to have been one of the most forcible sanctions of the Mosaic law; and by the same argument doth Solomon recommend the pursuit of religious wisdom. But though this might be the situation of things, under the patriarchal or the legal dispensation, the case is now greatly changed. The Christian system is not founded upon temporal, but
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eternal rewards and punishments; and there is a considerable alteration in the manners and customs of the earth, the diseases that prevail among the human race, and the constitutions we derive from our parents. Ill health, therefore, or a speedy disease, can by no means be regarded, at present, as a proof of the particular displeasure of God; nor the contrary as a proof of his particular affection. It is, indeed, true, that with respect to numbers of persons, their prudence, temperance, and virtue, contribute to protract the date of their being; and the reverse of these qualities produces opposite effects: but this is not a matter that falls at this time under our notice. Our business here will not be to treat of long life, as any way connected with the especial approbation or disapprobation of our Maker; but to give a general description of its advantages and disadvantages. And with relation to its advantages, we may observe, that by arriving at old age, our natural desire of continuing in the world is gratified. The love of existence is, for wise and gracious purposes, implanted deep in the human breast, by the

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Author of our frame. Had we not this principle within us, we should not be so careful of our preservation as we ought; but might be apt to expose our persons on every slight occasion, and to destroy our lives upon every trivial disgust. To the prevalence of this principle are owing the greater part of the occupations of men, and the mighty fatigues and labours they are willing to endure: and hence it is that we reluctant to the thoughts of dying, even when there is no peculiar reason that should render a continuance upon the earth desirable. Perhaps, it may be said, that this arises from the dread of futurity which takes possession of the soul: and it must be allowed, that the fear of something after death, is a grand cause of the terrors that seize upon the mind in its departing moments. But, in general, where there are no uneasy apprehensions, or where persons have comfortable prospects with respect to their everlasting bliss, the spirit, especially in younger years, cleaves to its accustomed habitation, and seems unwilling to change it, even for a house not made with hands,
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eternal in the heavens. That they may be spared to be old, is almost the universal hope, and wish, and prayer of youth. Now, have not those who are come to the decline of life had their hopes, and wishes, and prayers answered? Yes, they are arrived at that goal which others are solicitous to reach; they have experienced the benefit, whatever it be, of having their desires gratified; and therefore have abundant occasion to be thankful.

Another advantage of being continued to old age, is, that it may afford us the opportunity of tasting more fully the goodness of God in the blessings of the present world. That the earth is stored with the riches of the divine benevolence, and that the variety of its beautiful and useful productions was intended to promote the happiness of man, admits of no rational denial. If we cast our eyes around us, do we not behold a charming scene? Do we not behold whatever can give pleasure to the senses; whatever can captivate the imagination; whatever can delight the understanding; whatever can engage the affections? Do not all the

parts

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parts of nature, the sun, the moon, and the stars; the globe we dwell upon; the mighty ocean; the various flowers and fruits that adorn the surface of the ground; the humble shrubs, the stately trees, the gentle hills, the lofty mountains, the winding rivulets, the navigable streams, the different kinds of animals, the constitution of our own bodies, and the faculties of our souls, conspire to fill the heart with good? It is true, indeed, that no inferior enjoyments can bestow a felicity that is absolutely solid and durable. But yet there is something in all of them; and that something it is the intention of the Supreme Being we should possess, within the bounds of reason, prudence, and religion. But in order to this, it is necessary that our lives should be protracted, at least, for a considerable time. It is the privilege, of those who have seen many years, that they have had fuller ability of knowing and partaking the mercies which the free bounty of our Creator hath scattered around us. And that this is a privilege, is evident from the united suffrage of mankind. For are we not peculiarly affected, when any person

son is cut off in the bloom of life, amidst all his pleasing expectations? Should we not be ready to think it hard, in our youthful prime, to quit this delightful stage; to quit every flattering prospect of pleasure or power, of wealth or renown; to quit the chearful converse of our much-loved friends; to quit every amiable, tender, and engaging connection? Though the dictates of piety might demand our resignation, yet it would be but too natural for us to entertain such a sentiment, should we be called to the tomb at a period when our fond hearts had promised us a long train of joys succeeding one another. Whoever, therefore, it is on whom such a disappointment hath not been determined; whoever hath lived to participate largely of the feast of nature, as he hath experienced what satisfaction there is in the continuance of his health, his fortune, his relatives, or other gifts of the divine benignity, so he hath reason to acknowledge it with gratitude, that the mercy of Jehovah hath so long been manifested towards him.

Another advantage of existing to old age,

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is, that it may afford us the opportunity of beholding the establishment and increase of our families, and our posterity. This thought is, indeed, included in those general instances of the Almighty's goodness which we have been just considering; but it is proper to make a distinct mention of it, because it is expressly specified in the text; and because it is the grand reason why those who are already pretty far advanced in the journey of life, are still solicitous for a longer term. Job, it is said, "saw his sons, and "his sons sons, even four generations;" and it was, no doubt, a most agreeable circumstance to him. The affection of parents to their offspring, appears, of all ties, the strongest and most lasting. The knot of friendship is often broken; the love of brothers and sisters is sometimes lost, or turned into dislike; nay, in the marriage union, indifference, perhaps disgust and aversion, are frequently to be found: but for a father or a mother to be wholly destitute of tenderness to their progeny, is an uncommon case; and where it is to be met with is justly esteemed monstrous in the highest degree.

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gree. Even those who have not felt this connection can easily perceive that it must be a most sensible pleasure, to see the images of ourselves rising up to vigour and maturity, putting forth every amiable or useful accomplishment, and appearing with satisfaction and credit in the world. Nothing is more common than to find persons, who express their wishes that they may behold their children settled, and declare that, then, they shall die content. Nay, by a certain flattery of the imagination, they seem to think that, after death, the prosperity of their sons and their daughters will administer joy to their minds. Since, therefore, the human soul is thus constituted, it must be acknowledged, that when people have posterity bestowed upon them, and are witnesses to their flourishing and happy condition, it is a great blessing; one of the greatest blessings with which a long life can be favoured.

But we may add, once more, that another advantage of continuing to old age, is the opportunity of attaining to more extensive degrees of knowledge, piety, and usefulness. To acquire these qualifications is the grand pur-

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pose for which we are placed on the earth; and if every day sees us increase in wisdom and holiness, in love to God and man; if every day sees us increase in the communication of benefits to mankind; if every day sees us advance in a noble superiority to the present world, and a compleater preparation for the next; in such a case, a weight of years must bring with it an additional weight of authority, honour, and felicity.

Some, perhaps, would be glad to live long, that hence they might indulge their vices for a time, and trust to an after repentance and reformation. But this is a most dangerous delusion, since universal experience testifies, that they would only grow more confirmed in wickedness, and less inclined to tread the ways of religion; the consequence of which would be that a fulness of age would produce a proportionable fulness of misery and ruin. But where persons have set out in the right road, they will find their difficulties lessen, as they proceed in their journey. As years multiply upon them, they will become more free from the impetuosity of passions, and every temptation

temptation will have a less effect. Their evil inclinations will be more thoroughly rooted out, and their good ones more firmly established. Their affections will be brought into a juster harmony. Their path will be like the morning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Their faith will become more steady, active, and vigorous. Their love to God will mount on stronger pinions, and be carried to sublimer heights. Their zeal for the honour of their Maker will burn with a more animated fervour. Their benevolence, candour, and charity will increase and have larger scope. Their submission, patience, meekness, and humility will appear with a more distinguished lustre. And the happy consequences of such a wise and virtuous old age, will be the veneration of men, much authority and influence among them, inward peace, a sense of the divine favour, and a more glorious crown of reward in the eternal regions.

Having thus stated the advantages that may attend upon old age; we come, secondly, to consider the disadvantages to

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which it may be exposed. And here we are in the situation of a traveller, who, after having gone through a pleasing and well-cultivated country, where his eyes and his imagination were perpetually delighted with gentle hills, fruitful valleys, refreshing streams, and verdant woods, at length is obliged to traverse a wild desert, where nothing is presented to his view but almost barren sands, and, perhaps, some dreadful precipices at a distance. This, however, is the road we must take, if we would attain the end we have in view. And in stating the disadvantages to which old age may be subject, it is natural to observe, first, that by arriving to it, we may experience more of pain and affliction than we should otherwise have done. That calamities are attendant upon human life, as well as enjoyments, is too well known, and too much felt, to require a proof. It is known, also, that evils multiply upon us, as we advance into a length of years. The satisfaction of youth is, that we have seen little of the cares and vexations which harass those who have gone through a variety of
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of scenes. In our early days, every object is almost new to us, our spirits are lively, and our faculties are in their full vigour. But when novelty ceases to charm, when vivacity droops, when the powers of action grow feeble, the same pleasures become insipid that formerly filled us with transport. Though they be not taken away from us, yet we ourselves may change; and then, perhaps, complain that things around us are worse than they were. The sight of what is beautiful may not give that rapture to the eye, the sound of music may not bring that melody to the ear, the taste may not convey that flavour to the palate, nor the flowers carry that fragrance to the smell, of which we were once sensible. We may grow tired of eating, drinking, sleeping, and repeating a dull round of employments, that have nothing new, and nothing engaging.

Long life may not only make our enjoyments pall upon us while they last, but, likewise, remove them quite away. The larger the number of years is, that we continue upon earth, the more we shall probably see of the vanity and insufficiency

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of all created good. Heretofore, it may be, we exulted in the strength of our frame, in the affluence of our riches, in the extent of our power, in the splendour of our reputation; but increase of age may change the scene. Increase of age may take away our health, and put us in subjection to some tormenting pain, or lingering disorder. Increase of age may deprive us of our wealth, and expose us to the gripe of poverty. Increase of age may rob us of our dignity and renown, and leave us naked and defenceless to the attacks of every rude enemy to our peace. Increase of age may give us to experience how vain our expectations were of being permanently happy in this inferior state.

But besides remarking in general, that a long life may subject us to more afflictions than we should, otherwise, have known, it deserves particular notice, that, in consequence of it, we may survive our dearest friends and relatives. This is one of the most distressful circumstances to which a weight of days is liable. In youth we enter into those social connections which constitute

tute our most refined felicity; and form those tender ties, which cannot be broken, without tearing, as it were, the heart-strings asunder. But if our continuance here be protracted to a considerable length, we shall find that year after year steals one and another from us, for whom we had the highest regard. Have we a friend, with whom our souls have been united, from our first acquaintance with mankind, with whom we have taken sweet counsel together, and who hath shared with us every pleasure, and every pain? Have we a wife or a husband to whom we have been joined, not by the motives of caprice or interest alone, but by the dictates of a true esteem and an ardent affection; whose virtues have been our honour and delight; whose society has afforded us a sincere satisfaction; and whom time hath only rendered still more valuable? Have we a child that puts forth the buds of every lovely accomplishment, or that, perhaps, doth already reward the care and tenderness we bestowed upon it? In all these cases, is it not probable, that our reaching to old age may give us the

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exquisite grief of standing by their dying beds, and following them to the grave? Thus will breaches be made upon us, which cannot be repaired; and we may be left alone in a new world; may be surrounded by crouds of people that did not exist when we were young, and to whom we are strangers.

Besides, while our relatives remain with us, we may see an end to the consolation we expected from them. Not to mention other instances at present, is it not a common, alas! too common a case, for parents to be disappointed in the hopes they had entertained that their children would be flourishing and good? Do they not often behold them miserable or wicked? We need not, we cannot say, how piercing the anguish is that proceeds from such scenes.

Not, therefore, attempting to describe it, I go on to observe, that another disadvantage to which long life is liable, is, that in consequence of it, we may survive our faculties. That the faculties of the body are affected by age, that the clearest sight is turned into dimness, that the quickest hearing

hearing is changed into deafness, that the nicest taste becomes insipid, that the acutest smell loses its delicacy, that the most athletic strength ends in imbecillity, is well known; and the same thing doth, sometimes, happen with regard to the faculties of the mind. The powers of the soul, while united to this feeble frame, are so influenced by it, as, in some measure, to partake of its nature. Hence it is that these powers, in the present state of our being, are subject to weakness and decay. However true it is that wisdom is the property of many years, yet if these years be too many, a second infancy, and a much more deplorable one than the first was, may ensue. Nor are the persons of common understandings and abilities those alone who are exposed to this deep calamity; but such, likewise, as have been distinguished by the extent of their capacities. Nay, perhaps, the brightest spirits of the human kind may be the more apt to fall into the declension of which we are speaking. It is remarkable that several, who have been peculiarly eminent for their talents,

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lents, have, at length, been reduced to a state of idiotism. Such has been the case of the greatest wits, the most illustrious statesmen and commanders, and the most profound divines. And can we well conceive of any thing more truly affecting? Must it not be a sorrowful sight indeed, to behold the tears of childhood spring from those eyes that formerly sparkled with the conception and execution of noble exploits; or to hear folly come from those lips that were wont to utter the language of genius, knowledge, eloquence, and piety?

But quitting the painful theme, we shall just observe, that another disadvantage, though not, strictly speaking, belonging to it, which may attend upon old age, is, that the protraction of it, when men are corrupt in their dispositions, may afford them the opportunity of adding evil to evil, of growing more abandoned in themselves, and more hurtful in the world. There cannot be so detestable a sight as that of an ancient sinner; who, the longer he lives, becomes the more attached to his vices, and the more zealous to promote the prevalence of iniquity,

quity. Such an one, the slave of bad passions, loaded with crimes, tormented with the stings of conscience, the just mark of contempt or hatred in this life, and exposed to the punishments of the future state, must certainly be of all objects the most wretched. It is an object at which the imagination starts back with affright and horror: and where such consequences would ensue from a weight of years, it must, comparatively speaking, be a blessing to be cut off, even in the midst of our vices, because a heavier iniquity and condemnation would by that means be prevented. It might, also, be observed, that an early death may remove those who are not yet corrupted, from the influence of temptations they would not have been able to resist.

But, omitting any farther enlargement upon the matter, we shall proceed to point out some remarks which may arise from the subject we have been considering. And, upon surveying what hath been said on each side of the question, it is evident that long life may be desirable, or not desirable, as the circumstances are with which it is connected. A great Roman

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man philosopher hath endeavoured to prove that old age is a most happy state; and a considerable Roman satirist hath represented it as a most miserable one. What each of them hath alleged is true in some instances, but not in others. If a length of years should only add to our follies or our iniquities, if it only lays a foundation for bitterer reflections, and more aggravated ruin, it is, above all things, to be dreaded. Nay, where persons have no uneasy feelings of this kind, where they possess inward peace with regard to their own consciences, and enjoy a well-grounded hope in the favour of God, yet so complicated may be their afflictions, as to render a removal from the present world highly agreeable. If, towards the close of our mortal journey, we are troubled with numerous infirmities of body, if the powers of the mind are enfeebled, if we lie under the hard stroke of poverty, if we have no beloved friend or relative to alleviate our griefs, to explain the asking eye, and to lend the charitable hand of assistance and consolation, none can in such a case wish to be old. But if, on the contrary, we are
blessed

bleſſed with a competent ſhare of health, if our reaſonable faculties retain their vigour, if we have a ſufficiency for our ſubſiſtence, if thoſe are continued to us who are valuable in our eſteem, and dear to our affections, a long life may then be extremely pleaſing. Upon the whole, it is apparent, that a conſiderable advance in years may admit of various enjoyments, and, therefore, be juſtly looked upon as a felicity; but that a decrepid age is by no means to be deſired.

Farther, from what has been ſaid we may learn the wiſdom of God, in the preſent conſtitution of things, and an acquieſcence in his will, whatever he ſhall be pleaſed to determine with regard to our continuance below. Sometimes it is a happineſs to die ſoon; ſometimes it is a happineſs to die late. It is, then, a proof of the rectitude and goodneſs of the divine adminiſtration, that it is not decreed upon every one, that his days ſhall be numerous. A ſpeedy removal out of the preſent world, may take us away from a thouſand dangers and calamities that would, otherwiſe, have fallen upon us. Beſides, had all men an
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equal term of duration assigned them, they would assuredly know that their existence would be prolonged to a certain period; and what would be the consequence of that knowledge? Why, the consequence would be a delay of their immortal concerns, and an indulgence to their sensual appetites and passions. Trusting to the distance of death, they would plunge into all manner of crimes, and the earth would become a more shocking scene, than, in fact, it is. For the consciousness that, in youth, that instantly, we may be called into eternity, tends to restrain the soul from the impetuosity of evil, and to render us cautious and vigilant in our behaviour.

Since, therefore, the time of our existence below is wisely varied by the Deity, we should cheerfully submit to his appointments. We are under the direction of a righteous and most benevolent Governor, who always understands, and always performs, what is really conducive to our welfare. Doth he ordain that we should quickly be dismissed from this inferior state? it is our interest that it should be so. Doth he think fit to
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keep us here to a late season? it is necessary for our benefit, in the final result of things. Let us, then, commit our affairs with resignation and gratitude into his hands. Let us avoid the extremes of being anxious for life, or anxious for death. To tremble at the thought or mention of the grave, as some do, is a despicable meanness, and corrodes every pleasure. Passionately to long for it, is a fault on the other side, excepting in cases of peculiar distress. It is observable in the histories of several pious men, that they expressed a solicitude to be commanded away from this stage of existence, which favoured rather of impatience, than of a truly spiritual temper. The best disposition is to say, "Lord, thy will be done."

Again, it should be our great business to live to as much purpose as possible, while we do remain in the world. This is the grand, this is the important lesson that is inculcated by the uncertainty of our present being. Our years, perhaps, may be few; let us then be careful to fill them up with acts of piety, virtue, and usefulness.

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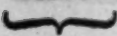
It is not the multitude of our days, but the multitude of our attainments and graces that constitutes our crown of glory. Very beautiful is the language of an apocryphal book. "For honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by numbers of years. But wisdom is the gray hair unto men, and unspotted life is old age."

Be it your endeavour, O my young friends! to crowd a deal into a narrow space. "Live while you live," hath been the motto to the arms of some worthy and considerable persons: let it be adopted by each of you, as the motto which shall regulate your behaviour. Be solicitous to live much in a little time. Live to every desirable, to every valuable, to every noble purpose. Seek for the approbation of God, seek for an interest in the everlasting blessings of the Gospel; strive to grow and abound in the work of the Lord. Many of those who have been most eminent for knowledge, goodness, and devotion, have died comparatively soon. Remember that the Saviour

finished his astonishing transactions in the compass of two or three years, and gave up the ghost when he was little more than thirty. In so short a period did he deliver his heavenly lectures of truth and duty; in so short a period did he exhibit his perfect pattern; in so short a period did he perform such an amazing variety of miracles and beneficent acts; in so short a period did he execute the will of the Father of mercies with regard to our salvation; in so short a period did he bring eternal life to the children of men. If, therefore, you have the least spark of a laudable emulation, O! be ambitious to imitate this divine, this god-like example of your Master; and may you be transformed into its complete likeness!

Lastly; we should, as far as it is in our power, lay a foundation for a happy old age. Though there are a number of afflictions which we cannot avert, yet, in several cases, much may depend on ourselves. We should be temperate in our enjoyments, because temperance may tend to preserve our constitution. We should

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be prudent in our affairs, because prudence may secure us a decent competence. Above all, we should store our minds with valuable knowledge, and have our hearts established in the principles of holiness: for thus, and thus only, shall we possess a fund of agreeable reflections, that will render our latter days peaceful and pleasant. An ancient man, who, by regularity and exercise, hath obtained a healthful body; who, by œconomy and diligence, hath acquired a moderate sufficiency; who hath a taste for reading and thinking; who is entitled to the satisfaction of an approving conscience; who is an illustrious pattern of piety and virtue; who is useful in this world, and still growing fitter and fitter for the next, is really a most noble and honourable sight. Are we not charmed with the picture? Do we not wish to resemble it? Let us, then, ardently strive to do it, if we would gain that respect, that dignity, that esteem, which alone can give lustre and felicity to old age. God grant that this may be more and more our portrait, should we be permitted to live through
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many years? And whether we are so or not, may we always maintain such a preparation for our last change, that, whenever it comes, we may awake to immortal glory! Amen.

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It is a machine that
is constantly breaking
down and needs to be
repaired.

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The second of these is the
fact that the world is
not a perfect machine.
It is a machine that
is constantly breaking
down and needs to be
repaired.

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The third of these is the
fact that the world is
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The fourth of these is the
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The fifth of these is the
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The BLESSEDNESS attending the MEMO-
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The memory of the just is blessed.

A Most valuable historian and moralist of antiquity hath observed, that he had rather not be known to have existed, than to have it asserted concerning him, that he was a person of a cruel and detestable character. The sentiment is a striking one, and carries along with it the evident proof of its coming from a right understanding and a well disposed heart. Would we wish to be remembered after our death, if we should only be remembered as having been contemptible, base, and infamous? Unless we are depraved to the last degree, it must be impossible that we should choose

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to be spoken of in a manner so disagreeable and hateful. Ignominy it is natural for us to avoid; and consequently it must be much better not to be mentioned at all, when we depart out of the present world, than to be mentioned in terms of aversion and reproach.

But there is a circumstance which is highly pleasing and important, and that is, to have our names recorded with honour, and our actions related with affection and esteem, when we have quitted this inferior scene. Will not the genuine original feelings of the soul instantaneously tell us that this is, indeed, desirable; and that it ought, therefore, to be our endeavour so to behave in life as to afford substantial reasons for our being applauded after our dissolution, whether we shall or shall not, in fact, receive the tribute of praise which is due to our conduct? It doth, also, generally happen that a proper measure of respect is rendered to worthy characters when they have left their mortal abode; agreeable to which is the observation of Solomon in the text, that "the memory of the just is blessed."

What is meant by the *just* is so well understood, that we need not, at present, enlarge upon the matter. We know that the word is here taken in its most extensive sense. It signifies men of universal integrity, men who discharge all the offices of piety and virtue. It includes such as are devout toward God; equitable and benevolent to their fellow-creatures; temperate, patient, and contented in their personal deportment. It comprehends those who endeavour to be found in the statutes of the Lord without exception, so far as human infirmity will admit; and who, when they have failed in any instance of obedience, return unto their Maker with sincere contrition for their offences, thankfully apply to the grace and assistance provided for them, humbly, yet firmly, resolve to behave better for the future, and actually put their holy resolutions in practice. The persons described in the text must, also, not satisfy themselves with being waveringly good, but preserve a consistency and perseverance of character: for unless they are, upon the whole, steady and uniform in

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purſuing the courſe of righteouſneſs, unleſs they continue in it till the cloſe of life, how can the remembrance of them be held in diſtinguiſhed honour and eſteem? Add to this, that they muſt, in ſome degree, be eminent for their ſpiritual and virtuous attainments. Their piety and purity, their integrity and benevolence muſt, at leaſt, be ſo far conſpicuous as not entirely to eſcape the notice of mankind.

Such is the general deſcription of the juſt; with regard to whom it will be my buſineſs, in the farther proſecution of the diſcourſe, to ſhew,

First, in what reſpects their memory is bleſſed. And,

Secondly, to improve the ſubject.

I am, firſt, to ſhew in what reſpects the memory of the juſt is bleſſed. There is in true goodneſs an original worth, a ſubſtantial excellence, that is founded on the eternal and unalterable reaſon of things. True goodneſs is commensurate with the exiſtence, enters into the eſſential nature, and conſtitutes the ſupreme glory, of the great Creator and Governour of the world.

So

So far, also, as other intellectual beings are possessed of it, and improve in it, so far do they preserve their real perfection and dignity: so far do they sustain and heighten the rank they are fitted for arriving at, among the divine works. There is nothing in the compass of the universe which can pretend to compare with genuine rectitude, holiness, and benevolence. "They cannot
" be valued with the gold of Ophir, with
" the precious onyx or the sapphire. The
" gold and the chrystal cannot equal them;
" and the exchange for them shall not be
" for jewels and fine gold. No mention
" shall be made of coral or of pearls; for
" the price of rectitude, holiness, and be-
" nevolence is above rubies*." Nor is it true merely with regard to the most valuable external possessions, that they are wholly contemptible and insignificant when put into competition with inward righteousness, but it is true, also, with respect to the brightest endowments of the understanding. Enlarged capacities of mind, if unaccompanied with pure and virtuous af-

* Job xxviii. 16, 17, 18.

fections,

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fections, or attended with evil and malignant ones, instead of adding to our worth and glory, sink us to the lowest pitch of infamy and baseness.

As real goodness is supremely excellent in itself, is it not, likewise, supremely beneficial in its consequences? Doth it not form the substantial, the durable happiness of those who are possessed of it? Yes, the more universally it exists in the world, the more securely and widely will felicity be established and diffused through the creation of God: so that were all intelligent beings completely pious, holy, and beneficent, all intelligent beings would be completely blessed.

Such, then, being the nature, and such the effects, of spiritual and moral dispositions and attainments, must they not for ever demand from us the warmest veneration and regard; and must we not honour and love the persons in whom they are found? Is not our doing this agreeable to every genuine dictate of reason and of the human heart? So long as we entertain a right notion of things, so long must we
look

look upon the truly good with the sentiments of approbation and affection, and be ready to give them the applause which is due to their conduct.

There are, notwithstanding, a number of circumstances that concur to prevent living worth from having the esteem always paid to it which it richly deserves. While the righteous continue to be inhabitants of the present world, their characters may not, perhaps, be sufficiently known; and it is certain that they cannot be finally settled and determined. It is possible, too, and, indeed, very probable, that they have their imperfections and imprudencies, which cast a shade on the splendour of their virtues. A difference of views, and an opposition of interest may, likewise, occasion them to be evil spoken of; or, at least, to be spoken of in a much slighter manner than is due to their real integrity and excellence. Nor have this difference of views and opposition of interests an influence upon the wicked alone, but even upon good men themselves, who are sometimes unhappily disposed to depreciate the graces, and injure the reputation

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putation of each other. Above all, is not envy, that base and malignant monster, ever detracting from superior merit? Is it not the nature of this hateful passion to bring down to its own low standard the worth it cannot reach; to aggravate faults, to diminish virtues, and to assign wrong motives to the fairest and noblest actions?

Such are the causes that often hinder the righteous from meeting, in this life, with the honour and praise which belong to their characters: and it may be wisely and kindly permitted by Providence that it should be so, in order to keep the faithful servants of God humble, and to guard them against expecting their full reward in the present state. But after death these causes will generally, though not universally, cease to operate. When the just are called from the scene of business and duty below, and translated to the eternal mansions, their real excellence will be acknowledged, and their imperfections be forgotten, except in the breasts which are the seats of peculiar rancour. A difference of views and opposition of interests will usually no longer be attended

ed to; and envy will not have matter to work upon: for it is chiefly living merit which it loves to tear in pieces and devour. At the decease of upright persons, the clouds that intercepted their reputation vanish, and they stand before us in the genuine beauty and splendour of their characters. Then, then it is that their memories become indeed blessed. And here we may observe,

First, that it is in itself a happiness to leave a good name behind us. "A good name," saith Solomon*, "is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver or gold." And again, he takes notice †, that "a good name is better than precious ointment." Is there not a fragrancy, a charm, a pleasure in it, which cannot but be highly delightful to the mind? We are led, by the very frame of our nature, to regard it as a desirable and valuable thing to be spoken of in terms of just commendation and esteem. There is a love of fame implanted in us by the Author of our mental constitution; and

* Prov. xxii. 1.

† Eccles. vii. 1.

though,

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though, like the other principles of the soul, it may be, and too often is, misapplied and perverted, yet it was certainly intended by God to answer wise and important purposes. It was designed to stimulate and urge us forward in the pursuit of whatever is truly excellent and noble. We cannot, we ought not to be indifferent to the sentiments of our fellow-creatures concerning us; and a total indifference in this respect hath been commonly attended with a base and corrupt heart.

As we should not be wholly insensible to our reputation while we live, so neither should we be absolutely careless about what may be said of us after our death. This is agreeable to the general, the unadulterated, views and feelings of mankind. What was it that produced the most splendid virtues, and the most shining actions of the pagan world? Was it not the desire of having their names transmitted to posterity with honour and renown? It is true that the heathens carried this matter to an excess; and that many of them were actuated chiefly, if not solely, by a regard to

to future applause. It is true, likewise, that Christians ought to be animated by much nobler motives. It is incumbent upon them to direct their prime view to the approbation of their Maker and their Saviour, to the testimony of their own consciences, and to the invisible and important realities of another state. But still, can it be otherwise than very desirable to leave a good name behind us; and do not the scriptures evidently consider the matter in the same light? The psalmist hath represented it as one part of the happiness of the righteous, that * “they shall be had “in everlasting remembrance;” and God hath declared, by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah, to certain persons who kept his sabbaths, who made it their choice to please him, and who took hold of his covenant, that he would give them an everlasting name that should not be cut off †. When, therefore, the virtues and graces of pious men do, in fact, cause them to be spoken of with veneration and affection after their deaths, is it not a real felicity?

* Ps. cxii. 6.

† Is. lvi. 4, 5.

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Will not all the feelings of the soul tell us, that the tribute of esteem and applause, which is usually paid to worthy characters, after their departure out of the present world, is in itself agreeable and delightful; and, consequently, that the memory of the just is in this respect blessed?

Secondly, the memory of the just is blessed, on account of the honour and pleasure it will reflect upon those who have been related to them, or closely connected with them. That the memory of the just does reflect honour and pleasure on those who have been related to them, or closely connected with them, we know by universal experience, and by an appeal to the natural sentiments of the human mind. Who is there that doth not consider it as a happiness to have descended from pious and valuable parents or ancestors? This we cannot but regard as a blessing, independently of the advantages with which it is commonly attended. Do we not look upon the reputation and the glory of the men who are united to us by the tender ties of consanguinity and alliance as in some measure

measure our own; and are not mankind, in general, disposed, in consequence of this, to view us in a more favourable and affectionate light? It is true that the best persons may spring from the worst; and, in this case, their characters will not be lessened, but, in the eye of reason, be heightened, by the difficulties and opposition they have encountered, and have actually overcome, in the course of holiness. Still, notwithstanding, it will ever be a satisfaction and credit, to be able to say that my father and mother, my progenitors and relatives, were devout, upright, and useful in their lives and conversations; that they were an honour to human nature, and ornaments to the gospel of Christ: and, on the other hand, we cannot but reflect upon it with a certain degree of shame, as well as regret, if it can be said that we drew our birth from, or were nearly allied to, persons whose conduct was profligate and worthless, and who brought upon themselves disgrace and infamy.

But let it be remembered, that the pleasure and reputation we are entitled to from

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the memory of our valuable ancestors, parents, kindred, and friends, greatly depend on our resembling them in their dispositions and actions. If we are not emulous of being like them; if, instead of being like them, our temper and behaviour are directly the reverse of theirs; their glory will subject us, in the end, to deeper reproach and misery.

It is not only in the more immediate, but even in the remoter, relations of life, that the character which good men leave behind them is a credit and satisfaction to such as have been connected with them. We are pleased to have been, in any measure, united with the eminently wise and worthy. We are glad that we were numbered among their acquaintance, and that we enjoyed some of their regard and esteem. Nay, have not persons of conspicuous and extraordinary merit, at times, cast no small lustre on the professions, the towns, the provinces, the countries by which they have been produced? This hath been manifested both with respect to intellectual and moral attainments. Does not the history of every nation

nation take a peculiar delight in holding out to view its famous warriors, patriots, and benefactors? Is Britain a little proud that she yields to no country under heaven for the mighty names she hath raised in arts and arms; for the bright luminaries she hath given birth to in church and state; for the noble characters, both of a civil and religious kind, which have adorned her annals? We cannot, therefore, doubt but that the memory of the just is blessed, upon account of the honour and pleasure it will reflect on those who have been related to them, or closely connected with them.

Thirdly, The memory of the just is blessed, in consequence of the happy effects which it is calculated to produce in the world. It is not only a valuable thing in itself, that the reputation of the righteous should flourish; it is not only delightful and creditable to their kindred, their friends, and their posterity; but the remembrance of their virtues and graces will be useful in the highest degree. Yes, the remembrance of their virtues and graces will be

The Blessedness attending

followed by the most important and beneficial consequences. As they exhibited a laudable pattern of devotion, integrity, and benevolence during their lives; so they leave behind them, at death, an example which will tend to excite a noble emulation. Have not great attainments been carried to perfection, and great actions been performed, by the divine ambition of imitating, equalling, and surpassing such as have gone before us in the path of excellence? Hath not this divine ambition produced heroes, lawgivers, and patriots? Hath it not produced the distinguished lights of science and learning? And are not we to expect from it the future ornaments and benefactors of the human race?

Nor hath the same principle been less serviceable in the grand interests and concerns of our immortal welfare. The power of example in religion is stronger and more prevailing than can well be expressed, or, perhaps, is thoroughly understood; though its influence, in this respect, is universally acknowledged. What charming, what admirable, what godlike effects have proceeded

ceeded from the example of Christ in particular! Hath not the beautiful, the affecting, the complete model which he hath set before us, animated thousands and thousands of his followers to tread in the steps of his piety, purity, meekness, humility, charity, and beneficence? Hath it not inspired them with the glorious ardour of resembling their Saviour? It hath done so; and the same ardour will it continue to inspire to the latest ages. The contemplation of it will ever be a source of the best improvements, and the sublimest felicity, among the disciples of Jesus.

In a similar, though far inferior, degree, will the patterns of good men in general be useful to the world. The recollection of their spiritual progress will warm us with a desire to walk as they walked; will strongly excite us to run *their* race, that we may finish our course with equal honour, and be rendered partakers of a like salvation. Well, then, may the memory of the just be looked upon as blessed, when it hath so engaging a tendency to make the virtues and graces of the reli-

gious life be more widely diffused in the earth, and handed down, in a beautiful succession, to future generations! The righteous may be compared to trees, which do not only themselves flourish in their season, and bear noble fruit; but from this fruit arise other trees, that, growing up in their turn to maturity and perfection, become the parents of a new and increasing set; by which means verdure and plenty will be propagated to the end of time.

Indeed, the happy effects proceeding from the conduct of good men, when they are departed out of the present state, independently of the influence of their example, are frequently very great. Their wise and pious instructions, their works of faith and labours of love, are not always confined to the narrow limits of their continuance below. Do they not often deliver truths, inculcate lessons, perform actions, and confer benefits, the consequences of which are delightfully felt in the remotest periods? Are not the advantages, both of a temporal and a spiritual nature, which the upright are the means of conveying down to succeeding

ceeding ages, sometimes important and valuable in the highest degree? and, when this is the case, is not their memory peculiarly blessed? Will it not be cherished with reverence, and mentioned with honour by an admiring and grateful posterity?

Let me here add, what seems plainly to be declared in several passages of scripture, and what might require a copious enlargement, would our time permit, that God is pleased to bestow, as a reward of the integrity and improvements of his faithful servants, extraordinary privileges and benefits on the persons who spring from them, or stand in some peculiar relation to them. Were not, for instance, the faith, the piety, and the righteousness of Abraham, the instruments of transmitting many favours and advantages to his descendants; and was not his name, on this account, deservedly had in everlasting remembrance?

Thus there are various respects in which the memory of the just is blessed: but the memory of all the just will not be blessed in an equal degree. A considerable diversity will take place in this point, according

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to the different progress that has been made in holiness and goodness. The more eminent any men have been for their christian and spiritual attainments, their characters will be recorded with the higher honour, and their names be recollected with the greater affection and applause. Will not the services, in particular, which they have done to their fellow-creatures, contribute, in an especial manner, to heighten their reputation, and to give weight and force to their example? There is a charm in actions of a beneficent nature and tendency, which cannot fail peculiarly to endear the remembrance of the persons by whom they have been performed, even though we ourselves derive no advantage from them. We behold with esteem and love every one, however confined his sphere of influence, who burns with the divine zeal of spreading happiness around him. What, then, are the sentiments we must entertain towards such as have not only been private, but public benefactors to the world; towards such as have communicated felicity not merely to the little circle of their immediate

relatives, acquaintance, and connections, but to large societies, to whole nations, and to distant ages? Must not the memory of the men who stand thus high in the rank of glory, virtue, and usefulness, be singularly blessed; and, above all, the memory of the men who have had the distinguished honour of being the chief promoters and propagators of religion and liberty, the two best gifts which God hath conferred, or can confer, upon the children of Adam?

Here I might present to you a catalogue of names that will for ever be reflected on with the utmost pleasure, that will for ever shine in the annals of fame; though it were to be wished that the catalogue had been still more illustrious and more numerous. When we collect together the noble and generous benefactors to the human race, the first place is undoubtedly due to our divine Master, who was eminently superior to the brightest characters that have adorned this terrestrial scene; who has rescued us from a tyranny of the worst kind, the slavery of sin and satan; and hath bestowed upon us the freedom of
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the soul, the freedom, that secures our eternal peace, perfection, and happiness. The next place belongs to the apostles of our Lord, who by their instructions, labours, and sufferings, were unspeakably instrumental in carrying on the same invaluable concerns of knowledge, piety, and immortal salvation, in which their blessed Lord was engaged. Then come the evangelists, the prophets, the patriarchs, and all the holy men who have been, in an extraordinary manner, inspired and commissioned by God to promote the interests of truth and righteousness. Lastly, the persons of every age, and rank, and character succeed, who have been raised up, in the ordinary course of Providence, for the purposes of advancing the welfare of their fellow-creatures, whether temporal or spiritual.

The time would fail me to tell of confessors and martyrs, who have submitted to the deepest calamities, who have even embraced death in its most hideous forms, for the sake of a good conscience, and for the testimony of Jesus. The time would fail me

me to tell of the zealous advocates for, and the faithful, the eminent, preachers of, religion, who have spent their lives in spreading the genuine doctrines of Christ, and in training up human beings to endless glory and blessedness. The time would fail me to tell of illustrious reformers, who have been produced, from age to age, to oppose the monstrous corruptions and daring pretensions of ecclesiastical tyranny, and to bring men back to their christian liberty, and the real purity and simplicity of the gospel worship. The time would fail me to tell of the patriots who have struggled, and the heroes who have fought, in the cause of liberty and of mankind. The time would fail me to tell the names of pagan and christian, of ancient and modern ages, that stand recorded in the history of the world for promoting the civil and religious interests of their fellow-creatures. All of you, ye illustrious spirits, have been remembered and spoken of with veneration and applause down to the present day; and ye shall be remembered and spoken of with equal, with increasing, veneration and applause,

SERM. plaufe, fo long as this globe continues to
XVI. exift.

It is not, however, the lot of the righteous in general to be held in fuch diftinguifhed renown. The righteous in general can only extend their reputation and their ufeulnefs to a fmall circle; fo that, in the courfe of a few years, the particular memory of them is entirely loft in the earth. Shall they, then, fink into endless oblivion? Shall the fair fruits of their piety eternally perifh, and never fpring up again to new life and verdure? God forbid that this fhould be the cafe with any of the faithful votaries of truth and goodnefs! Blessed be the name of our heavenly Father that, by the grace and promifes of the gofpel, he hath exalted us to nobler hopes and brighter expectations. Blessed be his merciful name, that there is a period in referve, in which all the juft, without exception, fhall be crowned with unfading honour and immortal glory. This globe we tread upon is too contemptible a theatre, and the human beings by whom we are furrounded are too fcanty a number of fpectators, to exhibit

exhibit the attainments, and to confer the applause, which belong to the genuine children of holiness, to the real disciples of Jesus. Their integrity shall be acknowledged and testified in the face of that august assembly which shall be collected together at the day of judgment. It shall be testified not only before all the inhabitants who have peopled the earth from its formation to its dissolution, but before the myriads of angels that surround the throne of God. It shall be testified by the Saviour himself, when seated on his grand tribunal; and the eternal Father shall approve the humble endeavours which his faithful servants have exerted to please him; shall graciously accept of their sincere though imperfect obedience; and shall seat them in those celestial mansions where they shall be had in everlasting remembrance and honour. What words can express, what colours can paint, what ideas conceive, the happiness and glory which the truly righteous shall enjoy in the heavenly regions! They shall enjoy a happiness and glory that will be infinitely superior to any satisfaction

or

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or credit they might meet with in the present state, from the applause of their fellow-creatures. They shall acquire a renown that is not derived from the feeble and erring voice of man, but from the declaration and the sanction of the benevolent Parent of the world.

And now, from what has been said, we may observe,

First, that if the memory of the just be so blessed, the memory of the unjust must be directly the reverse. This will follow, by a necessary consequence, from the description which has been given of the character and state of good persons: for if the virtues they are possessed of have a tendency to promote their reputation, and to cause their being mentioned with pleasure and esteem when they die, must not the vices of the wicked have an entirely opposite tendency? Accordingly, Solomon hath informed us, in the words succeeding the text, that "the name of the wicked shall rot." The attainments and graces of the upright diffuse a sweet odour around them, and delightfully embalm their remembrance;

but

but we cannot reflect on the profligate and the abandoned, without having sensations of mind correspondent to the sensations of the body, when we meet with objects that are loathsome to the eye, and offensive to the smell. It would be easy to prove, by a chain of observations similar to those we have pursued with regard to the righteous, that the memory of evil men is cursed, from the infamy which they bring upon their characters, from the shame and pain which they inspire into the breasts of such as have been closely connected with them, and from the pernicious effects which have proceeded from their corrupt examples and their bad actions: but let us, at present, only appeal to the voice of universal experience. Hath it ever been in the power of the impious and the unjust, when known and acknowledged to be such, to obtain the genuine approbation and esteem of their fellow-creatures? This is a tribute which cannot be procured by them even while they are living, and much less after their dissolution. Indeed, during their continuance in the present state, they may, if they
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be wealthy and potent, purchase the adulation of their dependents, and the external signs of homage and respect; but the real, the inward, applause even of their flatterers cannot possibly be bought: and then, with what freedom of censure and reproach are they treated after their decease! It is the unalterable appointment of God that the wicked, besides the dreadful doom which awaits them beyond the grave, shall in this world be, more or less, consigned over to disgrace and infamy; and with regard to such as have been distinguishingly villainous and profligate, the faithful pen of history will record their names in characters of indelible indignation and abhorrence. The whole train of oppressors and traitors, of tyrants and persecutors who have harassed and deformed this earthly globe, will be offensive to the nostrils of mankind, and be held in the deepest detestation, as long as the sun and moon shall endure.

Secondly, if the memory of the just be so blessed, how solicitous should each of us be to be numbered among the just! That we should endeavour to be numbered with the

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the just, is what we are called to by every possible argument. We are called to it by those grand and striking motives to religion which should always be present to our minds, and influence our conduct. But though we ought to be chiefly animated in the pursuit of spiritual attainments by a view to the inward excellence of rectitude, by a regard to the approbation of our Maker and our Saviour, and by the mighty, I had almost said, the irresistible incentives to holiness which are contained in the gospel; yet it cannot be right to neglect any consideration that has a tendency to quicken and invigorate us in the ways of piety and virtue.

Among other things, may not the desire of leaving a good name behind us be allowed to have some influence upon our behaviour, so long as we wish to acquire a good name by the cultivation of devout, pure, and benevolent dispositions, and by the practice of actions which are substantially valuable and useful? The praise of men ought not, indeed, by any means to be the chief spring of our conduct; but it

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should ever be our solicitude to act in a manner deserving of praise. For this purpose, we should be zealous to imitate the examples of those excellent persons who have gone before us in the paths of honour and glory, and whose memory will be eternally blessed. They have marched on in the road to the heavenly Zion with unshaken steadiness; they have finished their race with joy; and their happiness is fixed beyond the power of change. With one voice they call upon us to follow them in their illustrious career of devotion, integrity, and beneficence. They call upon us to mount, by the same steps which *they* have done, to the same heights of dignity and felicity. They animate, they urge, they beseech us to join their august assembly, and to become partakers of *their* salvation. Nor shall you, ye exalted saints, nor shall you, ye bright patterns of renown, in vain animate, urge, and beseech us, to copy after you. We hear, with pleasure, with emulation, your pathetic exhortations; and, by the assistance of the spirit of God on our humble and earnest endeavours, we will attain your
divine

divine accomplishments and virtues, that, at length, we may be raised to your delightful society, and *our* memories, like *yours*, be blessed for ever and ever. Once more,

Thirdly, let us retain a thankful and affectionate remembrance of the persons who have done honour to religion, and been useful to the world. This is a natural and just tribute of respect to their excellent characters; and it is a tribute that we cannot withhold, if we have any sense or feeling of what is truly laudable. If we forget, if we do not cherish the recollection of the men who have been the lights of piety, the ornaments of our nature, and the benefactors of the earth, we shall deserve to be branded with the epithets of ——— but we shall not, we cannot, forget them; we shall always cherish the recollection of them with the warmest sentiments of gratitude, veneration and esteem. The matchless graces, the mighty transactions, and the unspeakable love of our great Master, the instructions, the labours, the zeal of his apostles and evangelists; and the efforts of all, in every age, who have bled, or suf-

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ferred, or struggled, or wrote, or pleaded in the grand causes of truth, righteousness, liberty, and public happiness, shall ever dwell in our hearts, and be the delightful themes of our applauding lips. Indeed, it would be ungrateful, it would be criminal, to neglect any, provided they come within the sphere of our knowledge, who have reflected credit on the gospel, or promoted the welfare of their fellow-creatures. All who have answered to this character should be held in honourable remembrance, and especially those with whom we have more immediately been connected *.

* Here, when this discourse was first printed, was introduced the character of a most excellent and beloved friend, the friend of the Author's youth, the Rev. TIMOTHY LAUGHER, of Hackney. He died on the 29th of October, 1769, in the forty-fifth year of his age, and was succeeded in his congregation by the late Dr. PRICE.

SERMON

S E R M O N XVII.

The DOCTRINE of the NEW TESTAMENT
concerning the LORD'S SUPPER.

I CORINTHIANS, xi. 29.

*For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily,
eateth and drinketh damnation to himself,
not discerning the Lord's body.*

THERE are scarcely any parts of scripture which have been more misunderstood by the genuine disciples of the blessed Jesus, than what the great apostle of the Gentiles hath written to the Corinthians, concerning the nature of the Lord's Supper, and the qualifications for partaking of it. And yet this cannot have arisen from any difficulty in the place, when compared with the connection, or the design of the author, but is entirely owing to the unhappy interpretations, and the corrupt glosses and additions, of mistaken or crafty men,

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For several persons have deduced such strange consequences from St. Paul's doctrine, and have insisted upon such a variety of circumstances as necessary to communion, that hence have proceeded the error and the infelicity of vast numbers. But a juster sense of things has begun to prevail. A delightful and resplendent light hath appeared, where formerly there was nothing but darkness, or at best, gloomy clouds: and this light is at once so agreeable and so useful, that it ought to be communicated as extensively as possible, for the information, the satisfaction, and the benefit of all who are disposed to receive it.

With a view to promote so valuable an end, I have pitched on the words of the text, in treating upon which, I shall

First, consider wherein the eating and drinking unworthily, and the damnation consequent upon it, mentioned by the apostle, consisted.

Secondly, explain the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, in order to shew what is necessary to a worthy participation of it.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, represent the obligations we are under to partake of this ordinance.

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And

Fourthly, conclude with some remarks.

First, I shall consider wherein the eating and drinking unworthily, and the damnation consequent upon it, mentioned by the apostle, consisted. And it deserves to be remarked, that St. Paul is not here directing himself to christians in general, but to the Corinthians in particular. What he hath written was not originally composed with a reference to the state of believers, in all ages, places, and circumstances; but arose from some peculiar errors of the persons whom he addressed. It is certain that if the first converts had not fallen into mistakes and evil practices, with respect to the Lord's Supper, the passage would never have been found in the epistle. It must, indeed, be acknowledged, that it is at this day extremely useful to form and rectify our notions; but nevertheless, as it hath an immediate view to the conduct of the Corinthian disciples, we must enquire what

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SERM. that conduct was, in order to discover its
XVII. real meaning.

If we look back in the chapter, we shall find the apostle severely reproofing the Corinthians, because when they met together at the sacred table, they acted in a manner directly contrary to the nature and design of the ordinance. One instance in which they did so, is recorded in the eighteenth verse, "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it." It is well known that one intention of the Lord's Supper is to testify the relation which the followers of Jesus stand in to each other, as members of that society of which he is the common lawgiver and sovereign; and to shew their obligations to cultivate a mutual affection. But the Corinthians were, it seems, split into parties and factions, at the very time when they met to celebrate this holy and social institution. The other particulars in which they had behaved amiss, may be drawn from the twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second

second verses. "When ye come together,
" therefore into one place, this is not to
" eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating
" every one taketh before other, his own
" supper: and one is hungry, and another
" is drunken. What have ye not houses
" to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the
" church of God, and shame them that
" have not? what shall I say to you? shall
" I praise you in this? I praise you not."

It is visible in these words, that there are two things which St. Paul sets himself to correct; an error and a crime. The error against which he remonstrates, in the persons he is writing to, was their partaking of the Lord's Supper, as if it had been a common banquet. It was usual amongst the Greeks to have entertainments at the house of some friend, where every one brought his own provision, which he might eat at pleasure. At these entertainments, as might naturally be expected, the provision was very different, both in quantity and quality, according to the different inclinations and abilities of the guests. Such a kind of collation the Corinthians supposed the sacrament to be; but from what foundation

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dation they had taken up so strange an opinion, we are not able to say. This, however, they seem to have done, and the apostle condemns the notion with great strength and great reason. For the least attention to the nature of the ordinance will convince us that it is solely a religious act; and, consequently, that it ought not to be confounded with any of the ordinary occupations of life.

The error of the Corinthians was succeeded by very criminal behaviour. As they did not sufficiently distinguish between their customary banquets and this sacred festival, they observed it in a confused, disorderly, and intemperate manner. They carried the provision for their entertainments into the places where they assembled for christian worship. The rich had a needless superfluity, which, however, they did not offer to their poor brethren, who were destitute. The rich man was drunken, that is, he abused his abundance to a riotous excess; for we can scarcely suppose that he was actually intoxicated. On the contrary, the poor man was hungry, and in all probability murmured. And in this impious, this shameful situation, they pretended to celebrate

brate that solemn, that divine institution of our great Master, by which he designed to excite our gratitude and obedience to himself, and to animate our love for each other. When we read these things, can we avoid being astonished that original converts, that persons who had been instructed by the most illustrious of all the apostles, and who had extraordinary powers and gifts among themselves, should be guilty of such a disgraceful ignorance, and such a scandalous behaviour? How contrary was their deportment, in every respect, to the purpose of Jesus! It was his intention that by the social act of eating and drinking together, as brethren and fellow disciples, we should open the heart to the most generous and tender sentiments, and lay ourselves out in offices of reciprocal kindness. And yet the Corinthians gave way to schisms, strife, and debate. It is plain that so holy an institution as that of the Lord's Supper, should be separated from the ordinary business and amusements of life, performed at a select time and place, and with a decent solemnity. And yet the Corinthians united it with their customary collations. It is evident

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evident that on such an occasion our minds should be composed, our thoughts serious, our affections raised to the warmest fervours of a rational and exalted devotion. And yet the Corinthians came only to the table of gluttony, and the cup of intemperance: they loaded their bodies, and disordered their souls, with excess.

Such was the conduct reprov'd by the apostle; after which he proceeds, from the twenty-third verse of the chapter, to give an account of the original appointment of the Lord's Supper, as he had it by immediate revelation from Christ himself: an account directly conformable to what is recorded of the matter, in the writings of the evangelists. St. Paul then goes on, from this foundation, in the twenty-seventh verse, to shew that those were guilty of a great crime, who joined in communion unworthily; that is, without duly considering the nature of the ordinance in which they engaged. He advises them, therefore, in the twenty-eighth verse, to examine themselves by a diligent enquiry into the purposes of the institution; that by such an examination they might be led to partake of it, in a manner agreeable

agreeable to the intencion of the blessed Jesus. To this succeeds the text; "for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." That is, he that eateth and drinketh without properly reflecting on the design of the ordinance, without distinguishing it from a common banquet, and even converts it to the ends of intemperance and faction, exposeth himself to the divine judgments. Thus we see that the eating and drinking unworthily, mentioned by the apostle, has an immediate reference to the irregularities of which the Corinthians had been guilty.

The damnation spoken of, as the consequence of this unworthy participation of the sacrament, hath been as much misunderstood as the other part of the text; and the mistake has occasioned prodigious uneasiness to humble and sincere persons, and great harm to the christian world. The original word might with equal propriety have been translated judgment: and so the verb, from which it is derived, is a little after, actually translated.

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translated. It is very well known by those who are acquainted with scripture language, that the word does not always signify the final condemnation of the life to come; but that it is frequently applied to the temporal instances of our Maker's displeasure. That this was the case in the text, we learn in the following verse. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." From this passage, so expressly connected with the preceding one, it is undeniably apparent that the damnation treated of, is not the future punishment of an eternal state, but the present chastisements of the Deity. The Almighty had been pleased to visit some of the offenders with a decay of their health, others with violent disorders, and others with death itself. Even with regard to these last, however they might have failed in the performance of a positive duty, it is reasonable to believe they would be accepted by God, provided they had not wilfully transgressed against inward conviction, and were, upon the whole, real christians. As to the rest, the judgment they are said to have brought upon
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upon themselves, was so far from being an everlasting one, that we are expressly told it was a merciful correction inflicted upon them, on purpose to prevent their final ruin. Verse 32. "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." Such visitations as the Corinthians received, might at that time be extremely proper, to keep up a reverential regard to an ordinance which was then newly appointed; and the usefulness of which might have been totally frustrated at the beginning, if the profanation of it had not been immediately checked by some extraordinary method.

From all that has been said, it is, I hope, quite evident, what little reason is afforded by the text, for sincere christians to fill their hearts with anxiety. It is, indeed, possible for persons to eat and drink unworthily, who are not guilty of the particular actions which the apostle condemns. But then they must be guilty of the evil dispositions from which those actions proceeded. Wherever St. Paul's argument by parity of reasoning

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reasoning will reach, so far it may lawfully be extended. If any man, at the time of his eating the bread, and drinking the wine, hath no regard to the duty in which he seems to engage; if he does not religiously commemorate the death of his divine Master; if he retaineth no sense of the obedience to which the Saviour is entitled; if he feels no affection for his christian brethren: if, on the contrary, his thoughts and behaviour are directly inconsistent with the nature of the institution, and the temper he is obliged to cultivate in his approach to it; he then certainly partakes of the ordinance in an unworthy manner, though he may not have offended in those particular instances of indecency with which the Corinthians were chargeable. Yet even in this case it ought to be observed, that if a person hath acted ill at one opportunity, it does not follow that he should abstain from the next. He should seek to God for pardon and assistance; and endeavour, on future occasions, to be found in a more holy and heavenly frame. Thus the guilty Corinthians were not forbidden to
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come again to the sacred table, but were exhorted to do it hereafter, with greater regularity, decorum, and piety. I now proceed,

Secondly, to explain the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, in order to shew what is necessary to a worthy participation of it. It is only by considering the genuine intention of our great Master in his appointment of it, that we can be able to ascertain the qualifications which are requisite to our joining in the ordinance. This is the method which was taken by St. Paul, in the chapter where the text lies. After he hath given a full account of the manner in which it was instituted by the blessed Jesus, he then directs the Corinthians, from that account, to examine their views and their dispositions, in order to judge whether they had a right to communion. We must, therefore, have recourse to the declarations of the Son of God himself, as recorded by his disciples, if we desire to obtain proper notions concerning this matter.

Now, from the relations of the evangelists and St. Paul, we are authorized to assert

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in the first place, that the grand leading purpose of the Lord's Supper, is to keep up a religious memorial of the death of Christ. This is evident from the words of the institution. Our divine Master, when he had taken the bread, had given thanks, and had broken it, distributed it to the apostles, and said, "This is my body, which is broken for you." So likewise when he took the cup, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." To which if we add the observation of St. Paul, that "as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we do shew the Lord's death till he come," it will be apparent that the principal view of the Saviour in this ordinance, is to maintain, in all ages of the church, until his final manifestation at the last day, a standing commemoration of his obedience to the will of God, and his affection to sinners, in dying upon the cross. By the breaking of bread, the wounds and agonies which the body of Jesus underwent, are recollected; and in the pouring out of the wine, we have a lively emblem of that blood by which the new covenant

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of pardon was ratified; that blood which was shed for many, for the remission of sins. In short, it is intended by these transactions that we should publicly acknowledge, and call to mind, this grand fact, that the Messiah suffered unto death. Nor are we to do it in a formal and careless manner; but with souls deeply affected at the contemplation of a scene of such mighty importance.

In consequence of this, secondly, it must be the design of the Lord's Supper, that we exhibit a general testimony of our faith in Christ, our acceptance of his religion, and our subjection to his laws. This is a point incontestably plain from the original notion of the sacrament, as a religious remembrance of our great Master; a notion which evidently implies in it, that, at the same time, we profess our belief in his sacred authority, our submission to the method of acquiring the divine favour by him appointed, and our regard to the obligation of his precepts. It is, likewise, upon this supposition that the apostle argues, when he shews that Christians ought not to join with

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the heathens, by feasting in their temples, upon what had been offered to their false gods. 1 Cor. x. 21. "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of demons." The intention of St. Paul is here undoubtedly to prove, that as their uniting at the table of the Lord was a solemn declaration of their being his disciples, it was, therefore, wholly inconsistent with any degree of even seeming veneration for the heathen worship; and should prevent them from eating openly of the sacrifices that had been dedicated to demons. Indeed, when our Saviour ordered the wine to be drunk as a memorial of the covenant confirmed by his blood, it must certainly have been his purpose that by this rite we should be led to consider the nature of that covenant, and assent to its demands.

The third and last view of the Lord's Supper is to testify the connection we have with each other, as disciples of the same Jesus, and obliged, upon that account, to maintain a mutual affection. It is true that
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this idea is not expressly mentioned in the original institution. But that it is included in it, is apparent from the fundamental design of the ordinance. For as it is intended to be a public testimony of the relation we stand in to Christ as our common master, it must necessarily signify that we are members of that one body of which he is the head. Eating and drinking together is as much a social act as any thing can possibly be; and eating and drinking together in a religious manner, was, among the ancient nations in general, regarded as a token of reciprocal friendship. But the matter is put out of doubt by the apostle St. Paul, 1 Cor. x. 16, 17. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion," or joint partaking, "of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion," or joint partaking, "of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." From these words it is abundantly plain, that as in the joint partaking of the bread and wine in the commemoration of the Redeemer's death, we declare our fellowship with him; so,

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likewise, we profess our communion with each other. We acknowledge ourselves, as Christians, to be nearly and intimately related; to constitute one entire society, distinct from the rest of the world; and obliged, by virtue of this union, to be kind, tender, placable; even as God in Christ hath forgiven us.

Having thus considered the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, nothing is more easy than hence to shew what is necessary in order to communicate in a worthy manner. If a person desires to remember the death of Jesus with gratitude and affection; if he is willing to proclaim his belief in him, and his acceptance of him, as a master whose laws he will study to obey, and a Saviour whose terms he will endeavour to comply with; if he is solicitous to testify his love towards those who are united with him in the same bonds of religion; he has then not only a right, but it is his duty to approach the sacred table. But if any man hath such a disregard to the Messiah, that he does not wish to commemorate his dying compassion to the world; if he rejects his divine authority, refuses to own him as his lawgiver,

lawgiver, and despises the blessings that are by him dispensed from the great Parent of mercies; if he doth not choose to acknowledge the followers of Christ as his fellow disciples and brethren, he ought to abstain from communion. In such a case, his heart is unfit for it, and he should have no part or lot in this matter. The questions, therefore, which a person who seeks to know the state of his soul, should put to himself, are such as these. Am I so sensible of the great things which Jesus Christ, in obedience to the will of the Father, hath performed for mankind; and particularly, of the grand instance of affection he exhibited on the cross, as to desire that I may ever maintain a flow of the most pious and thankful passions on this account? Do I so firmly believe in him, as the prophet and head of the church, that I would willingly be saved by him in the method of repentance and universal holiness which he hath commanded? Have I such a value for the covenant established by him, that I am resolved to accept this covenant with gratitude, and to adhere to it with my whole

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soul? Have I such a regard to all Christians, that I wish to behave towards them with that candour, harmony, and kindness, which the connection we bear, as followers of the same master, requires at my hands? Whoever can answer to these questions with a genuine approbation of his inward dispositions; whoever can appeal to the Almighty in the sincerity of his heart, and say that he is ready to testify his grateful acknowledgment and remembrance of the Redeemer's death; that he is desirous to assent to his demands, to obey his precepts, and to embrace, with the open arms of good-will and tenderness, the human race in general, and especially every real servant of Christ; that is the man who is qualified to participate of the sacrament, and who should hasten to comply with the institution of Jesus.

To this he is strongly and undeniably urged in the New Testament; as will appear while I represent,

Thirdly, the obligations we are under to partake of the Lord's Supper. It is allowed by all who understand the nature of
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true religion; that when moral and positive duties interfere, the preference must be given to the former. The reason is, that moral precepts are eternally and unalterably binding; are in themselves beautiful, excellent, and useful; and are the grand ends in subserviency to which rituals are appointed. Whereas the positive ones are only beneficial at particular times, and in particular circumstances; and derive their principal value from their tendency to promote other things, of inward and essential importance. "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," is the declaration of sacred writ; a declaration agreeable to all the dictates of natural light, and confirmed by all the tenor of revelation. It is the determinate doctrine both of the Old and the New Testament, that to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God, is vastly superior in worth to the strictest observation of external institutions, even when prescribed by the Supreme Being himself. But though these truths should ever rest upon our minds, as what are of the highest necessity to regulate our conduct; yet no argument

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gument can hence be formed, to justify a neglect of positive appointments: because when weightier matters do not intervene, we are obliged to comply with them, if plainly commanded by a divine legislator.

With regard to the christian religion, we are convinced by a variety of evidence, that the Lord Jesus was sent from God, to teach men the way of knowledge, holiness, and happiness. We are convinced that the Father hath made him the prophet, the law-giver, and the sovereign of the church; and that whatever precepts he has delivered, it is our indispensable duty to obey them. Now although the general series of our Saviour's commands hath an immediate reference to those virtues of piety, benevolence, integrity, and self-government, which are dictated by the light of nature, and which the relations we stand in to the Deity, to ourselves, and our fellow-creatures, at all times require at our hands; yet we find in the gospel some few external rites. We are, in particular, directed to meet together at certain seasons, in the places appropriated to divine worship, and there publicly to eat bread and

drink wine, as tokens that we religiously remember our dying Redeemer; that we receive his laws, accept his religion, and venerate his authority; and that we possess a sincere affection for each other. This we are ordered to do, in four different places of holy writ. The precept was given by our Lord himself; it was uttered with the greatest solemnity; and it was attended with actions, as well as words. For the blessed Jesus did not only instruct his disciples to observe the institution hereafter; but made them instantly perform it. The expressions he used are as plain as can be devised. He was now at the approach of death; a circumstance which renders the injunctions of friends peculiarly forcible; and we are assured that this rite is to be observed in all the succeeding ages of the world, even until his second coming, at the final consummation of things. That the sacrament is an ordinance of considerable importance, and intended for a perpetual memorial, is farther apparent from our Saviour's delivering the account of it to St. Paul, by immediate revelation. We find, likewise, that at the first

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first propagation of the gospel, all professing Christians partook of it. The distinction between hearers and communicants had not then taken place; and therefore it seems to have stood on the same foundation with our obligation to attend public worship in general.

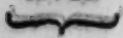
All these circumstances being compared together, I would ask, in what possible manner we can pretend to evade so evident a command? Shall we say that we are not obliged to obey it, though it is absolutely enjoined by our Lord? This we cannot do, without renouncing his authority. If, then, we call ourselves the disciples of Jesus, what justifiable reason can we assign for the wilful neglect of any precept, that is insisted upon by our divine Master?

It deserves also to be considered how much satisfaction we may lose by trifling in this matter. It must undoubtedly afford some uneasiness to a sincere servant of the Redeemer, when he reflects that he is pursuing a course which his own mind tells him to be contrary to his character and obligations, as a follower of Christ; not to
mention,

mention, that by such a behaviour, we are deprived of the consolation which arises from joining in an ordinance so delightful, as that of the Lord's Supper; a consolation that springs, in general, from the sense of having discharged our duty; and in particular, from the pleasing views of our honour and happiness as Christians, which at that time engage our contemplations. May it not, likewise, justly be expected, that a person who has continued in the neglect of a command which he believed to be prescribed by his Saviour, will want that full tranquillity and joy at the hour of death, which he might, otherwise, have experienced?

Should, after all, any be inclined to think, that the sacrament is a mere ceremony, a trifle not important enough to require much of our attention; we may observe that nothing can be a trifle which is ordered by God, and which is calculated to produce excellent purposes in the heart, even the purposes of inward piety, and substantial goodness.

Several other thoughts might here be added: but what has been already said may suffice

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suffice to shew, that if we believe the divine mission of Jesus, we are bound in this, as well as in other instances, to obey his precepts. I must, however, beg leave to be here understood as making a great difference between those who abstain from communion, in consequence of a wilful disregard to it, and those humble upright minds who are held back by nothing but their unhappy fears and scruples. The last persons are indeed objects of tenderness and compassion; and I would earnestly recommend to them the careful consideration of what hath been suggested under the first head.

I shall now conclude with some remarks, arising from what has been said. And first, we may see the wisdom and goodness of the appointment of the Lord's Supper. I am not insensible that much difficulty has been raised upon this head; and that persons disaffected to christianity, have endeavoured to expose the gospel on account of its positive institutions; as if it were its design to make religion consist in outward observances and useless ceremonies. But nothing can be more unjust than the least insinuation of
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this kind. Some degree of external form is necessary to keep up the appearance of piety in the world; and it is the excellence of the New Testament that it requires no more of this external form than is highly important to the best inward purposes; no more of it than is proper to restrain the superstitious fancies, and prevent the foolish inventions of men.

We find, by experience, that it has been the practice of mankind, in all ages, to multiply the rites of worship in a needless and ridiculous manner. Now had there not been any outward appointments in the revelation of the blessed Jesus, the professors of it, having no direction from their great Master, might have thought themselves at liberty to follow their own imaginations without controul. But a strict adherence to the ordinances of Christ, and to them only, would put a stop to such a conduct, and become the best foundation of a rational homage to the Deity. Indeed, the whole history of the church will inform us, that where a careful attention to the rules of the gospel hath been maintained, there the public

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lic service of God hath been plain, solid, and edifying. While, on the other hand, a departure from the simplicity practised and directed by our Saviour and his apostles, has produced an exuberance of folly and superstition that is quite astonishing, and hath brought infinite scandal on the christian name.

As the wisdom and benevolence of the Redeemer is thus apparent, in admitting some few external institutions into his system of religion; so with respect to the Lord's Supper in particular, what appointment could we think upon, that is less liable to objection? It is plain to be understood; it is easy to be observed; and every end it is intended to answer, is desirable and important.

The manifestation of Jesus is the most illustrious and momentous event that can possibly engage our meditations. From his life and death, his resurrection and glorification, we derive our assurances of pardon, peace, and happiness. For our benefit he poured divine instruction from his lips, and shone forth with an all-perfect, all-lovely, example.

example. For our benefit, he submitted to a course of the most evil treatment from his bitter enemies, to the agonies of the cross, and to become the subject of death. For our benefit, he rose again with power and lustre, and ascended into the mansions of eternal blessedness. And shall the amiable, the excellent, the beneficial deeds of this Saviour, be buried in oblivion? Forbid it gratitude, duty, interest! forbid it every consideration that can work upon the mind! With great wisdom and goodness, therefore, did Jesus institute a rite which should call his love to our memories, and awaken each pious passion in our breasts: a rite, which by the breaking of bread, and the pouring out of wine, should especially represent to us that most signal proof of his and his heavenly Father's affection, when his tender frame was exposed to wounds and bruises, and streams of precious blood issued from his sacred veins.

The more we consider the matter, the more we shall perceive that there was a peculiar propriety in pointing out, by a particular ordinance, a fact of such immense

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importance in the scheme of revelation. Nay, we might venture, perhaps, to assert, that in some dark and corrupted ages, when the scriptures were held from the common people, and very little studied by the priests, the death of Christ would have been almost forgotten, had not the remembrance of it been constantly kept up, by the celebration of the sacrament.

Again; the vanities of the world, the allurements of sensual pleasure, the charms of ambition, the splendour of riches; in short, temptations from present objects of every kind, have often too fatal an influence on our temper and conduct. They have a melancholy aptitude to draw the soul aside to folly, and to obliterate the impressions of divine things. It was, therefore, a wise and kind intention of the Redeemer, by enjoining a frequent repetition of the Lord's Supper, to call back the wandering heart of man to a sense of his duty and obligations as a christian.

Once more; though the religion of Jesus is altogether gentle, generous, and beneficent; though its whole tendency is to cor-

rect the humours, sweeten the dispositions, and enlarge the affections of men; and though it enforces all this upon us by motives surprisngly powerful and affecting, yet such is the perverseness of the human mind, that jealousies and contentions, envy, wrath, and malice, too often find admittance there. Was it not, then, an instance of our Saviour's wisdom and benevolence, by uniting us together at the sacrament, to urge the putting away of bitterness and anger, evil speaking and revenge; and to inspire us with condescension, compassion, and love?

Secondly, from the account that has been given of the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, we may perceive the folly and iniquity of those unscriptural terms of communion, upon which great numbers have insisted. It is well known, that subscription to a set of articles; an assent to some particular doctrines either not found at all in the gospel, or, at least, not mentioned as essential; and a compliance with certain ceremonies and gestures, have in one church and another, been required of their

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members. By such impositions the peace of the christian world hath been prodigiously disturbed, and endless disorders and calamities have prevailed in the earth. Nay, in consequence of such impositions, rivers of blood have been shed among professors of the same religion: and the continuance of these impositions is still a grand cause of the divisions, strife, and uncharitableness, that subsist amidst those who are called after the name of the merciful Jesus. But what can be more impious than for persons to prescribe laws and tests, which Christ himself hath not prescribed? Is not this to set ourselves up in his stead, and to wrest the dominion out of his hands? The sacrament, as it was by him appointed, was intended to be an uniting ordinance; and none ought, on any pretence, to be excluded from it, who profess, and appear, to be his sincere followers. We should, therefore, be studious to keep exactly to his institution, without mixing our own fancies, or bigotry, or temporal policy, with what the Saviour alone had a right to direct.

Thirdly, from what has been said we may
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correct the superstitious and dangerous notions which many entertain concerning the Lord's Supper. The Roman Catholics suppose that the body and blood of Christ are actually present under the forms both of the bread and the wine; and that he is swallowed whole by every communicant. Not to insist upon the infinite absurdities and absolute contradictions with which this opinion is clogged; absurdities and contradictions that no words can exaggerate, and which must fill a thinking mind with the highest astonishment; the opinion itself, without regard to the impossibility of its being true, is contrary to the very nature of the ordinance. For as it is designed to be the memorial of a past fact, and must be performed in remembrance of Jesus as a person corporally absent, how can he be actually present? A careful examination will, I am persuaded, convince us, that the expression, "this is my body," doth not immediately and exclusively relate to the bread only, but to the whole action of eating; and in that case there is not the least ground for the doctrine of transubstan-

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tiation, even taking the words in their most literal sense.

The protestant world hath, also, been prodigiously infected with errors upon the same subject, though not of the same kind with that just mentioned. Some are ready to think that they have communicated in an unworthy manner, because their passions have not been violently moved. Others carry their ideas of the sacrament too high, by placing it at a vast distance from the common duties of religious worship; and by preferring it even to prayer, which is certainly the most solemn act of devotion in which a creature can engage. Others imagine that it seals to them the pardon of their sins. Nay, great numbers look upon it as a sort of charm, that will give them a passport to heaven, whatever their inward dispositions may have been. This is a supposition extremely fatal in its tendency, and is too much encouraged by the manner in which the communion is frequently administered to dying persons, and especially condemned malefactors; which leads both them and others into false hopes, that are destructive

destructive to their souls. Such sentiments, and the practices which favour them, are in reality a scandal to the christian name. The only use of the Lord's Supper is to impress those affecting views of the death of Christ, and that deep sense of our obligations as his disciples, which shall be calculated to render us truly and internally holy, just, and good; and should this end not be answered in our minds, it is at best an idle, and if trusted in, a dangerous ceremony.

Lastly, we should each of us be solicitous to attend upon the sacrament, with proper qualifications, views, and dispositions. If it be asked what kind of preparation is peculiarly necessary, in order to our approaching the sacred table; it may be answered, that the real followers of the Saviour should always be in a prepared state. There is nothing in the nature of the ordinance which forbids our partaking of it on the most sudden warning; provided we understand it in any tolerable degree, and are inclined to communicate in a serious manner. Since, however, particular seasons

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are generally set apart for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, with which we are previously acquainted; it must certainly be very useful to collect our thoughts beforehand, and to furnish our minds with suitable reflections. We should, therefore, employ our meditations on the design and excellency of the gospel; on the noble system of doctrines and duties it contains; on the illustrious, divine, and complete example of the blessed Jesus; on the important privileges, the valuable promises, and the ravishing prospects his revelation affords; and on the bright and convincing evidence with which it is attended. We should contemplate on that essential and unparalleled benevolence of the Deity, from which the whole scheme of our redemption was derived; and on the affection and zeal which our Lord displayed in the prosecution of his great work. Above all, we should impress upon our souls a strong sense of the special and immediate purposes for which the sacrament was appointed.

When we actually join in communion, we should be concerned that our affections
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be properly directed, and warmly engaged. To have our hearts fixed upon the vanities, or profits, or cares of the world, while we are present at the sacred table, is certainly a direct violation of the ordinance: and, therefore, we should be extremely desirous to maintain a right temper and behaviour at that time. We should study to abstract our thoughts, as much as possible, from every foreign, every terrestrial, consideration; and to have our pious passions fervently employed in the solemn service. ‘Retire, O my soul,’ we may each of us say, ‘from this inferior scene of things; from all its pleasures, and all its pursuits; and hold communion with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ. Meditate upon that infinite goodness of God which contrived the illustrious plan, that displays pardon, peace, and endless happiness, to so undeserving a creature as thou art. Recollect that condescension and tenderness which the Saviour manifested in the whole of his conduct. Call to mind the admirable instructions he offered, the charming pattern he exhibited, the hard labours
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‘ and sufferings he endured, in the course
 ‘ of his ministry. Especially, call to
 ‘ mind the ignominy, the reproaches, the
 ‘ agonies he went through, when he hung
 ‘ upon the cross, and proclaimed ever-
 ‘ lasting mercy. Think upon these affect-
 ‘ ing subjects, till thy heart is filled with
 ‘ sorrow for thine iniquities; till thy faith
 ‘ becometh lively, active, and fruitful; till
 ‘ thy gratitude and love are elevated to the
 ‘ highest pitch; till thy obedience is ren-
 ‘ dered uniform, steady, and complete.
 ‘ Hast thou, O my God, and Parent of uni-
 ‘ versal nature, so illustriously manifested thy
 ‘ compassion to sinners, as not to spare thy
 ‘ well-beloved Son? Hast thou sent the
 ‘ Saviour into the world, in order to raise the
 ‘ children of men to immortality, perfec-
 ‘ tion, and glory? And am I now in thy
 ‘ presence, on purpose to celebrate that in-
 ‘ stitution, which requires me to commemo-
 ‘ rate the death of the Messiah; to de-
 ‘ clare my public acceptance of his excel-
 ‘ lent revelation, and my regard to my
 ‘ christian brethren? May then the re-
 ‘ membrance of his beneficence dwell upon
 ‘ my

‘ my mind and my tongue, for ever and
‘ ever! May I consider, and comply with
‘ the intention of his gospel! And may
‘ the sentiments of kindness and charity to-
‘ wards all my fellow men and fellow dis-
‘ ciples, reign in my breast, with increasing
‘ purity, and increasing zeal!’

Such are the views which should possess our souls when we partake of the Lord's Supper. But it will signify little to entertain these views at that time, unless the effects of them be apparent in our future conversation. A transient flow of affections, or sallies of immediate delight, were not principally intended in the ordinance. The blessed Jesus did not ordain it as a ceremony, or a charm; but as a proper method of establishing our hearts in pious and virtuous dispositions. Though you have therefore, O! christians, obeyed your Lord's command, in this appointment, and may have found your passions greatly moved; yet that is not the whole that is required at your hands. For hence it is justly expected that you should live to the honour of your divine Master. As you have solemnly pro-
fessed

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possessed your faith in him, and your love towards him, the reality of your faith and love should be evidenced by walking more strictly in the way of his precepts; and by abounding in that heavenly character and temper, which his spotless example so engagingly recommends. Thus only, will the sacrament become subservient to the most beneficial purposes. Thus only, will it be instrumental in qualifying us for sharing in the dignity and felicity possessed by our exalted Saviour. And God grant that all the followers of his Son, may, by uniting together at the communion, advance from holiness to holiness, till they shall arrive at the regions of everlasting blessedness! Amen.

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